SPECIAL ISSUE

2015 RUT GUIDE

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- **Beat the Crowds:** How to Score on Pressured Ground p. 64
- **5 Reasons** to **Shoot Does** During the Rut p. 44
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BY CHRISTIAN BERG

Attitude is Everything

Over the past few years, I've developed a passion for Little League baseball that rivals my passion for bowhunting. Thankfully, they have different seasons!

As a volunteer coach with two sons in our local Little League program, I'm at the ball field anywhere from four to six evenings a week from spring through summer.

While I enjoy many aspects of the Little League experience — from building team chemistry to in-game strategizing — by far the most gratifying part is watching players improve. From the most talented kids on the roster right on down the line, each one ends the season far ahead of where they started, and seeing that growth makes all the hours invested worthwhile.



This mature Pennsylvania 9-pointer is at the top of Editor Christian Berg's 2015 hit list. There is no guarantee of getting a shot at a great buck such as this, but with the right attitude you can guarantee you'll have fun trying!

Regarding player development, fundamentals and good mechanics are only half the equation. Equally important is the mental side. Developing a solid understanding of the game and learning to perform under pressure are just as important as being able to throw across the diamond or hit the ball over the fence.

In this regard, attitude is everything. Because without the right attitude, the emotions of the moment can be overwhelming. Any coach can tell you stories about batters so afraid to strike out they couldn't swing the bat or pitchers so frustrated by a fielding error they couldn't throw the ball over the plate. Allowing your emotions to control your actions is rarely helpful on the ball field — or in a treestand.

One of my fellow coaches has a saying he likes to tell pitchers who are scuffling on the mound: "Just smile and throw strikes!" Every time I hear it, I chuckle. Yet the message is perfect. A pitcher can't control the umpire's calls. He can't control whether the batter swings or where the ball is hit. And he can't control how well the defense plays behind him. All he can control is his attitude and where he throws the ball. So, the best thing to do is keep a positive attitude, throw strikes and let the rest take care of itself.

As bowhunters, we would do well to heed this lesson. Let's face it; many of us build up so much anticipation for the season that we head into the woods feeling a tremendous pressure to succeed. And if we don't, the letdown is almost unbearable. I've been there myself, and I can tell you it's a miserable place to be.

There's no need for something as wonderful as bowhunting to be that way. We ought to find as much joy in the journey (hunting) as we do in the destination (killing). And when things don't go according to plan (they seldom do), we can't allow that to rob us of our love of the game. After all, we can't control Mother Nature. We can't control other hunters who rudely invade our honey holes. And we certainly can't control the big bucks in our area and make them walk under our stands.

So, my coaching advice to you this fall is, "Just smile and bowhunt!" If you've practiced shooting all summer, monitored local bucks on your trail cameras and set up a handful of high-odds stand locations, it's time to hunt hard and let the chips fall where they may. Regardless of the outcome, resolve to maintain a positive attitude. Use your experiences to develop a deeper understanding of the game and end the season a better bowhunter than you started.

After all, you've waited 11 months for the whitetail rut to arrive; you may as well enjoy it.

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Much-Needed Advice

I can't thank John Dudley enough for *Mastering Your Release Aid* (August 2015)! I started bowhunting late in life and I'm only going on my tenth year of hunting. When I started, some very good friends guided me the best they could, but I never received any formal instruction.

As the years went by, I saw little improvement in my groups despite practicing constantly. I decided I must not be practicing far enough away, so I moved my distance further out with absolutely awful results. No matter how hard I tried, I couldn't get any decent groups.

This year, I decided to completely re-evaluate everything about my form and started by having my draw length checked again. I had been shooting a 29-inch draw for the past 9 years, but after being measured by a quality pro shop I found my draw length was actually 28 inches. Shortening my draw length excited me, as I thought I had found the glitch in my form. Nope — it improved a little, but I still wasn't happy.

My two girls are currently going through archery lessons, and one of the key points the instructor preaches is pulling through the release. I could see how it was important to them with their finger release, but I did not know how I could incorporate it with a release aid.

John's article immediately caught my eye. No one had ever discussed my release aid with me before. I had it set up in a way that seemed comfortable, but after reading the article it occurred to me I was reaching for the trigger and punching it.

I quickly grabbed my gear and headed back out to my practice range. After making some necessary adjustments on my release aid, I settled in at 25 yards to test the method John wrote about. After only a couple of shots, I was amazed at how much more secure the bow felt in my hands. I also noticed my arrow release was a surprise and I was pulling straight back on my follow through. I was shocked. I backed up to 35 yards and tried again. I ended up with a tight group in the heart of my target. The next test was 45 yards, and once again another tight group!

I know this is only one night of practice, but I truly believe my poor setup with my release aid was a big part of my problem. Thanks for providing some great and timely advice!

Rob Wilkinson, via e-mail

Hats Off to Randy!

I've been bowhunting now for 25 years. I have subscribed to your magazine for many years also. Through trial and error I have come to the same conclusions that Randy Ulmer is preaching — slower, heavier, quieter. Twenty years ago I shot a 70-pound bow with 280-grain arrows. I'm now still at 70 pounds, but have upped my arrow weight to 550 grains. Randy is the only person talking about this that I have come across in either magazines or on TV. I appreciate you guys publishing his common sense logic.

James, via e-mail

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Celebrating Science

Just wanted to say I absolutely loved the *Killer Results* fixed-blade broadhead test article in the September issue. Being a forensic scientist myself, I'm happy to see the scientific method being applied to product testing in our beloved sport. I read that article with eager eyes and was waiting to see which broadhead, overall, came out on top. But after reading all the data, there wasn't a paragraph on the overall winner! Strange, I thought; all this wonderful data, yet no conclusions?

Rob Boyle, Dallas, Texas

PB Responds: Declaring a single winner is difficult, because there is so much variation from category to category. For example, two of the top heads in our sharpness test ranked relatively low in our hemorrhage test. And a couple of the best penetrating heads sustained extensive damage in our zero-penetration test.

So, rather than declaring a single broadhead the best, we would rather present our data and let each hunter choose a model that excels in the areas they deem most important.

Editor Christian Berg

A New Tradition

I subscribed to *BOWHUNTING* in May and received the first two issues in the mail at the same time in July. I cannot say enough how impressed I am with this magazine.

The first article I read was *When Little is Big* by Matt Guedes. I happened to be reading it out loud to my 4-year-old son while he ate his dinner. I felt it was the absolute perfect article to read to him and made a great point to me as I prepare for my first hunting season this year. We have now made it a tradition to read the "hunting stories" together at night.

Danielle Madison, New Haven, Vt.



Keep Hammering, Cam!

A freelance article published in the September issue included a negative comment about professional bowhunter Cameron Hanes (www.cameronhanes.com) that regrettably slipped through the editing process.

The entire *BOWHUNTING* team would like to take this opportunity to apoligize for the oversight and express our appreciation for Hanes, an accomplished hunter and extreme athlete who has inspired thousands of fellow bowhunters and made myriad contributions to the archery community.

Keep hammering, Cam!

Editor Christian Berg

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BY **MARK DEMKO**

Ashley Bennicoff



Pennsylvania high school student Ashley Bennicoff was inspired to take up hunting by her father, Ed. The long-time Girl Scout also participates in dance and volleyball but still makes time to accompany her dad in the whitetail woods.

Age: 14

Home State: Pennsylvania

Occupation: High school student and Girl Scout

Years Bowhunting: 2

Current Crossbow: Excalibur Vortex

Favorite Animal to Hunt: Whitetail deer

Q: What inspired you to take an interest in hunting?

A: My dad would come home with a deer, and I wanted to be just like him. He would tell me stories about seeing animals, and I wanted to experience it. When he bought me my first bow, I could not wait to go shooting with him.

Q: Most young people start hunting with a firearm. Why did you begin with a crossbow?

A: I began with a crossbow because I enjoy a challenge. Lots of people hunt with a gun and get a deer from far away. I like seeing the deer up close and trying to not have them see me.

Q: You've been a Girl Scout since first grade. Is there anything you've learned in Scouts that has helped prepare you for hunting?

A: Being a Girl Scout taught me that girls can do anything, as long as they put their minds to it. Girl Scouts gave me confidence. It taught me to always try my best, even if a task appeared too be to challenging.

Q: Last fall, you had a couple close encounters with deer. What were your thoughts when that first one came close enough for a shot?

A: My first feeling was excitment and then I got a bit scared as the deer got closer. It was the closest I'd ever been to a deer. I couldn't stop shaking because I was so nervous. I felt like it was a mini-earthquake in my body.

Q: Finding a 14-year-old girl who loves to archery hunt is rather rare. What do your friends at school think?

A: My friends think it's really cool that I archery hunt. Some of my friends hunt as well, but with a firearm. Very few kids in my school archery hunt, but I love it.

Q: You also play volleyball and dance. How do you still find time to fit hunting into all your activities?

A: Fortunately, dance is only Monday through Thursday. Volleyball practice is Monday and Wednesday, with games on Saturday mornings. Girl Scouts is every other Monday. I am able to go hunting with my dad on Friday evenings, on Saturday mornings before volleyball, and on Saturday evenings.

Q: What's your favorite thing about being in the woods?

A: My favorite thing about being in the woods is seeing wildlife in its natural habitat. One evening, we saw two red foxes at the same time, and I thought it was really cool. They have really pretty coats and are cool creatures. Also, I love spending time with my dad.



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BY **DR. GRANT WOODS**

Which Doe to Harvest



Deciding how many does to shoot, and which ones to target, depends on the herd size and habitat conditions where you hunt. In areas with very high deer numbers and overbrowsed habitat, taking any doe that wanders into bow range may be the best approach. But in areas where a more modest doe harvest is called for, selectively focusing on younger does is a better option.

In the last issue I shared recent data from five states that reported the largest increases in deer populations. Even if your state isn't represented in the report, there are many individual properties throughout the whitetail's range that have worked to improve the habitat and balance the predator and prey populations. This has resulted in increasing populations of whitetail deer on these properties.

Deer populations can increase by 25 percent or more annually. The best way to balance the number of deer and the amount of quality forage is to harvest does. With more and more information being published about the nutritional value of venison, most folks consider the need to harvest does a blessing.

If there are more deer than quality forage, the most important goal is to either remove a sufficient quantity of does so each deer has plenty of quality forage, or improve the habitat until there's enough quality forage for each deer to express its full potential. If you're lucky, you can work on both goals at the same time.

When to Shoot

Hunters are often curious which age class of does should be harvested to improve the herd's quality. The answer to this question depends on several factors. If the hunters have a history of missing doe harvest quotas, or the habitat quality is substantially reduced due to being overbrowsed, then the most important objective is removing enough does. Which does are removed isn't as important as ensuring the doe harvest goal is reached. If does are to be harvested, there are many benefits to harvesting them during the first part of the season.

The first is removing does so bucks don't expend energy tending them. Mature bucks in captivity have been shown to lose more than 25 percent of their body weight during the rut. Imagine the cost of tending does in the wild where bucks most likely spend more energy seeking, tending and defending does. If does are harvested early, many bucks could save a lot of energy and have more resources to survive the winter and produce larger antlers the following year.

Fewer does can also result in bucks spending more time searching during the rut. However, this doesn't mean bucks leave their home range seeking does. Bucks will exhibit rutting behavior whether there are does present or not. A buck's testosterone level is keyed by the amount of light during a day, not how many does he contacts.

There have been hunfreds of GPS collars placed on mature bucks. Scientists have learned that throughout the whitetail range, bucks rarely leave their home — even during the rut. Certainly, some bucks do make quick trips outside their normal home range, but these tend to last less than 36 hours. However, it's extremely rare for a 2-year-old or older buck to leave its home range for an extended period. This is good news for hunters who have postponed harvesting does because they feared fewer does where they hunt would result in bucks leaving the property and searching for does on neighboring properties. It seems bucks are more fearful of the unknown outside their home range than they are interested in finding additional does.

Mature or Immature?

Another common question is whether it's better for the herd if hunters remove mature or immature does. This somewhat depends on the local conditions and the site-specific herd-management goals. For example, if only a relatively small doe harvest is recommended, it may be slightly better to harvest younger does. Younger does usually don't produce as many fawns and their fawns have a lower survival rate. This is because younger does are simply less experienced mothers. They don't have as much experience avoiding predators and finding quality food resources. By passing on mature does and harvesting younger ones, there's less impact on the herd's ability to recruit fawns and increase in population size.

If the herd is grossly overpopulated and quality forage is being damaged, it is usually better to focus on meeting the doe harvest quota and not be picky about which does to tag. If the hunter has a choice because multiple does are in range, attempt to harvest the most mature doe for the same reasons listed above.

Finally, there is the myth of the "old barren does." This is probably because human females finish their reproductive stage long before they reach old age. However, this isn't true with female deer. If does are healthy, they will typically produce twins through most, if not all, of their lives. If mature does are not producing fawns, there's most likely a problem with the local habitat quality and/or there are too many predators in the area.

If you hunt in an area where there is great habitat quality and few deer/human conflicts — such as crop damage — then there is no need to tag many does this fall. On the other hand, if the best quality forage is being damaged due to over browsing, it's time to harvest does and help the herd and habitat quality improve!





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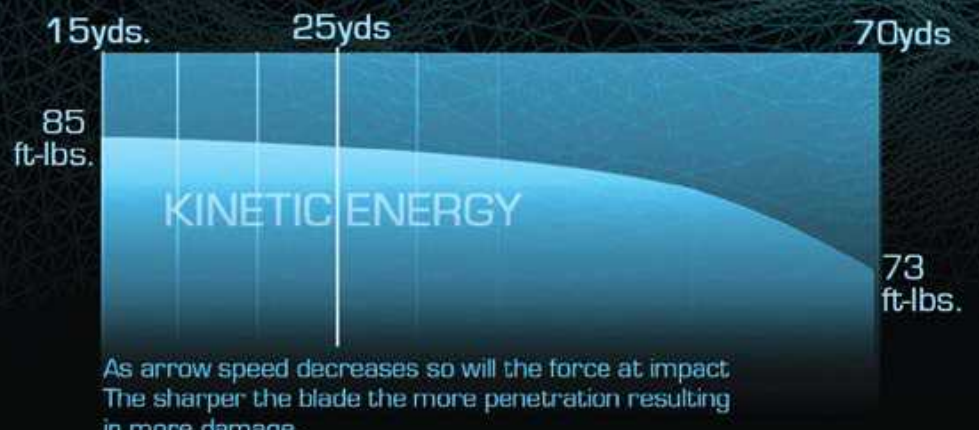
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THE AUTOPSY REPORT

BY DR. GRANT WOODS

- The key here is how quick the HAVOC went right **THROUGH THE SCAPULA**
- **DOUBLE LUNGED** it for sure.
- Without examining the remains, I would suspect the aorta was cut given the **VOLUME OF BLOOD** loss that rapidly.
- Only a **SUPER SHARP** and **SUPER TOUGH** broadhead can carry through all those vitals after hitting the scapula.

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with Bill Winke

Q: I am planning on taking full advantage of early-season bowhunting in New Jersey. My concern is after the kill. What kind of timeframe are we looking at from gutting to getting the deer into the freezer so as not to let any meat spoil? I'm about 45 minutes from the nearest butcher.

Jeremy from New Jersey, via e-mail

A: Forty-five minutes is no big deal; you probably have a couple of hours if you use ice. The ideal solution would be to kill your deer quickly with a perfect shot, get to it immediately and gut it right away. That way you get the blood and organs out of the carcass. The blood is actually what spoils first. With a clean kill, the deer bleeds out nicely and there is no stagnant blood left in the meat. Gutting starts the cooling process. Next, you can stuff a couple bags of ice into the chest cavity to help speed cooling as you drive to the butcher. That should be sufficient.

If the butcher is not open at the time you shoot the deer (an evening hunt, for example) then you should get the deer home and hang it in your garage and skin it right away to cool it off quickly. It will cool enough with the skin off that it won't spoil during a normal evening. I have purchased cheesecloth game bags in the past to cover the meat after skinning so it doesn't get dirty when transporting, but a good, clean tarp would probably work to lay it on when taking it to the butcher.

The other solution is to learn to do your own processing. Debone the meat and put it in a cooler with ice (with the drain plug out) and you can cut it up at your convenience during the next couple of days. Good luck.

Q: What are the best areas to put trail cameras during the season? When should you put cameras on scrapes?

Preston from Wisconsin, via e-mail

A: Scrapes are a good choice during the season, for sure. I have also had some luck putting them on funnels such as open gates and creek crossings. The main thing I do though is to set them on time-lapse mode and put them on the edges of small feeding areas or at the corners of larger ones to see what is coming out each evening. I would start to put them on scrapes soon after the scrapes begin to appear, for sure by mid-October.

Q: What is your favorite type of terrain feature to hunt? What about isolated food plots?

Danny from Florida, via e-mail

A: Probably ditches. The deer go around the top of the ditch, and if you cut out the downed trees in the bottom of the ditch, you can sneak right up it to the stand and not leave any scent in places deer can find it. It takes work to hunt ditches, but they are very productive. Small, isolated food plots are better even than ditches, for sure, but they aren't technically terrain features and they do require a lot of time to create. If you can do it, these small plots are killer spots for morning or evening.

TIP OF THE MONTH

Luke from Minnesota has a challenging hunting area. He has a 175-acre farm, of which 120 acres is timber. The land is quite rugged, with a lot of deep ravines and high ridges. His biggest problem is that his only access points are from the bottom fields, so it is extremely tough to get in and out without being seen or smelled as the deer are all bedded up on the ridges. It is also tough because he has to cross the fields where there are typically deer feeding in the evenings. He suggests that he might be able to get permission from a neighbor to cross on top, but then then he would have a long walk to his stands and would be walking through the ridges where the deer are bedded. Getting there in the morning isn't too bad thanks to the darkness, but afternoon hunts can be difficult.

I have hunted that kind of terrain a lot since I grew up in Northeast Iowa where the land is very rugged. I hunted the ridges and points in the mornings by accessing from below and making the long, hard walk up the hills. In the afternoons, I hunted the fields on top or funnels on top (fence lines were a common stand site). I also hunted the evenings from stands on ridges closer to the fields – not way back near the bedding areas. I also hunted ditch funnels a lot too; where the draws came up close to the fields there were always funnels around the head of the draw.

Luke, you need to rethink your evening stands. They shouldn't necessarily be the same ones you would hunt in the mornings. The deer are doing different things in the evening (heading to food) than they are in the mornings (heading to bed). So, you need to hunt accordingly. If I were forced to just hunt from the bottom in the evenings, I likely would have struggled a lot more during that time of the day. When hunting the bottom fields there will be wind swirling. When the wind is blowing parallel to the bottom, it can work without swirling, but even then if it gusts, it will swirl. It is tough to hunt those bottoms. I would get permission from the neighbor so you have some afternoon stand options on the ridge tops, but farther from where the deer mostly bed. Good luck.



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BY **BILL WINKE**

Tackling Three Controversial Topics



Hunting over a small food plot will increase your odds of getting a deer within bow range, but according to the author, it is far from the same as hunting over bait.

I must be a glutton for punishment; there is no other reason to take on this subject. Editor Christian Berg recently sent me a comment from a reader regarding food plots and the ethics related to hunting over them. He suggested that the subject might be too narrow for a complete column but might fit into something I was writing and was worth covering.

In trying to come up with an overall theme that the food-plot question would fit into, I decided to touch on the three most controversial subjects I have found myself a part of in the past few years.

I have my own ideas of what constitutes ethical bowhunting, and I am guessing you do too. I know what brings me the most enjoyment and satisfaction. It may be different from the way you like to hunt, but as long as your way is legal, I won't condemn you. However, I have learned not everyone feels this way. I have gotten fried more than once for things I have said or done, so warm up the fry pan; here goes.

Food Plots vs. Bait

First off, I have nothing against baiting. I don't do it in most places where it is legal, nor do I think that baiting is necessary in most places for a successful bowhunt. I have hunted over bait in Texas though. If it is legal, I have no problem with you doing it.

That said, I don't believe food plots are the same as baiting. I have heard the arguments that state I am wrong, and yes, I agree a small food plot does increase the number of deer within bow range. However, I will say it doesn't concentrate them as tightly as a pile of corn.

The real difference comes in regarding what you can grow versus what you can pour out. You can pour into a small pile something that is lot more attractive than what you can grow in a small food plot. I can't produce a 10x10-foot corn plot right where I want it. That small plot won't make it past the raccoons, the deer or the squirrels (or even the blue jays) to produce anything by October. It will be gone immediately. So to plant corn, I need a fairly big plot where I am no longer concentrating deer. They have every opportunity to sneak in and out without ever offering a shot.

Sure, I can plant something else, say a very small clover plot, near my stand that will likely make it through to the hunting season, but it will not be nearly as attractive to deer as a pile of corn. I wager that if I run a trail camera over a small clover plot on my farm I will get a few dozen photos in a week's time — maybe 100 images at the very most. If I run the same camera over a pile of corn, I might get thousands of photos. It makes that much difference. Though food plots do give you an advantage over hunters who don't use them, they are not the same as baiting.

Taking "Questionable" Shots

I got fried a few years ago over video that showed me shooting a deer that was facing me directly through the chest. The shot was only 15 yards, and I shoot a heavy draw weight with an arrow and broadhead combination capable of producing lots of penetration. The deer was dead in a few seconds. I explained my thinking and why this was not a shot for everyone, but that didn't stop the criticism.

Walking shots are also often tabbed as being "unethical." Long-range shots also fall into this category. People are quick to say it is wrong to shoot past some arbitrary distance, 30 yards for example, or maybe 40. How do they come up with this?

The thing is that shot selection is not a one-size-fits-all deal. A shot that is unethical for a starting bowhunter may be perfectly fine for someone with more experience or for someone shooting other than "average" tackle.

I do agree that the long shots are questionable in some cases, but not because the archer isn't good enough to make the shot. I am sure there are guys out there who are good enough to kill a whitetail or mule deer at 100 yards if the deer stands still, but that is the whole point. Game animals don't always (or even usually) stand still that long. Therefore, the bowhunter has to carefully consider the length of the shot relative to whether the animal is likely to move before the arrow arrives. I don't know if that is what you call ethics or if it is just responsible bowhunting.

Mechanical vs. Fixed-Blade

I once almost got into a fistfight with a guide down at Tara Wildlife Plantation in Mississippi because I was shooting mechanical broadheads. To him, it must have been one of God's unforgivable sins, because he harassed and picked at me unmercifully about it. Finally, I was forced to point out to him that I was sick of it and that while he was using a recurve bow, something that is commendable as long as you take shots you can make, he was also using the pod (an arrow-mounted poison delivery system that was legal in Mississippi at that time).

I found it ironic that he was jumping me for shooting a small-diameter mechanical head that penetrated like a hot knife through butter while he was using an arrow tipped with poison. I still had to make good shots, but his deer would die quickly no matter where he hit them. Even a flesh wound resulted in a very dead deer. I am not sure how he reconciled that, but ethics are sometimes very self-serving and exclusively personal.

ONLINE EXTRA

*Visit **www.bowhuntingmag.com** to see Bill Winke's video discussion of bowhunting ethics.*

I have been in several other camps where I had to defend my choice in broadheads in surprisingly heated conversations. Never once have I seen grown men nearly fight over which bow is better, but start to talk about their broadheads (or their biases for and against certain styles) and you are in for a battle.

Personally, I think accuracy is the most important part of a shot at game. If you hit where you are aiming, you avoid many other tradeoffs that might otherwise come into play. The most accurate heads I have ever shot are mechanicals. That is why I shoot them.



Field Editor Bill Winke killed this buck with a 15-yard frontal shot, creating some controversy when shown on video. This is not a good shot angle for most bowhunters, but with the right equipment and enough experience, it will produce devastating results. This is the nature of the ethics debate. What is right for one bowhunter is not necessarily right for everyone else.

Conclusion

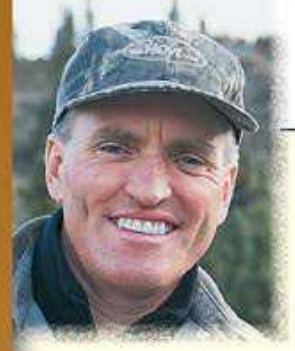
Ethics are a personal thing. One person's ideas of what is right and wrong are not necessarily good for everyone else. I do agree that if we are taking too much advantage of the resource, or wounding game needlessly, that we are crossing a line. Sometimes the law does allow this, as in the case of long or irresponsible shots, so it is not as simple as just accepting anything that is legal. We do have an important responsibility to the sport and to the animals we hunt to pursue them fairly and to kill them quickly.

But, that aside, the "how we do it" part is not black and white. In the end, I believe each bowhunter will eventually settle in on the method of hunting that maximizes their satisfaction in the sport.

At first, it may be the method that brings them the most success. But later, they may be most satisfied by using a certain hunting style, or the using certain hunting gear. Maybe they don't like to hunt any movement patterns that are manipulated by man, sticking instead to purely natural movement. Or maybe they prefer to hunt only with traditional equipment. Sure, they could be more successful if they opted for other hunting methods or equipment, but their enjoyment of the sport is not only about success. It is more about the way they do it.

And who am I to say that your way is not just as good as mine?





BY RANDY ULMER

Evidence of a Surprise Release

I am always preaching that your release should come as a surprise. I'm so persistent because I know if you try to time the shot to the exact moment your pin is on the spot, you're really just punching the trigger. Sooner or later, this is going to cause serious problems with your shooting. If you issue a mental *Now!* command when triggering your release, you're eventually going to fight target panic in some form or another. As a disclaimer, I do know a few good archers who shoot well this way, but they are a very small minority.

On the other hand, using a surprise release prevents you from anticipating the shot and ruining it. You won't lock up, twitch or go into a spasm trying to time the release. With the surprise release, you have only one job — hold the pin as close to the spot as you can until the bow fires. There's no urgency, because there is no element of timing. If you don't understand this concept and implement it, you'll never reach your full potential as an archer and you aren't nearly as likely to be a good hunting shot. The really bad news is this — the problem tends to manifest itself when the pressure is highest. So, the worst shot you might make this year could be the one that is most important to you.

The Follow-Through

With a surprise release, everything that was going on before the shot continues for at least an instant after the shot. The bottom line is, you change nothing because your muscles don't know when the shot is coming, so they don't have time to change what they are doing. Your release arm should come straight back immediately upon the explosion because it instantly went from holding about 15 pounds to holding nothing. The bow should fall away a little immediately after the shot. The reason the bow falls is because part of what holds the bow up is the force on the string holding the bow back. When this force goes away at the instant of the release, the bow naturally falls a little.

When you punch the trigger or consciously time the shot, the release is not a surprise. Your release arm probably won't fly back, and your bow arm probably won't drop. They'll just stay put (with some punchers the bow arm will actually drop a milli-second *BEFORE* the shot). Your hands and arms don't move much because at the same moment your brain tells your index finger to punch the trigger, it also tells your release hand to stop pulling back and your bow arm not to fall. At the exact instant of the shot, you're consciously causing changes in your muscular activity, altering the forces on the bow just as the arrow is leaving. You're getting the muscles actively involved just at the precise moment that they ought to stay motionless and relaxed.



Sometimes it is difficult to know whether you are punching the trigger, because a lot of things are happening at the instant of release. By analyzing your follow-through you can discern what you were doing at the moment of the explosion. If you are using a surprise release, your follow through should show your release hand moving backwards and your bow arm falling a little.

The problem with this "dead release" is that it looks good to the uneducated observer. People tend to assume that if neither one of your hands moved after the shot, you must have good follow-through. However, you need to know the difference, not only for yourself, but also for anyone else you want to help. The easiest (and believe me, it *isn't* easy) way to learn to shoot with a surprise release is to use a back-tension release aid because it is very difficult to time. It'll keep you honest and teach you what a surprise release feels like.

Tips for Unrepentant Trigger Punchers

I hesitate to write the next few paragraphs, but I will for you stubborn types. For those who simply can't, or won't, use a release-aid correctly, I'm giving in and offering a few tips. My first tip is to go back and read the last section several more times. But with that said, here are five things you should do if you insist on shooting the wrong way.

First, get your pin on the spot you want to hit as quickly after you reach full draw as possible. In fact, if you can draw the bow with the pin more or less pointing at the spot, that is ideal. The less you have to move the bow after hitting full draw the better.

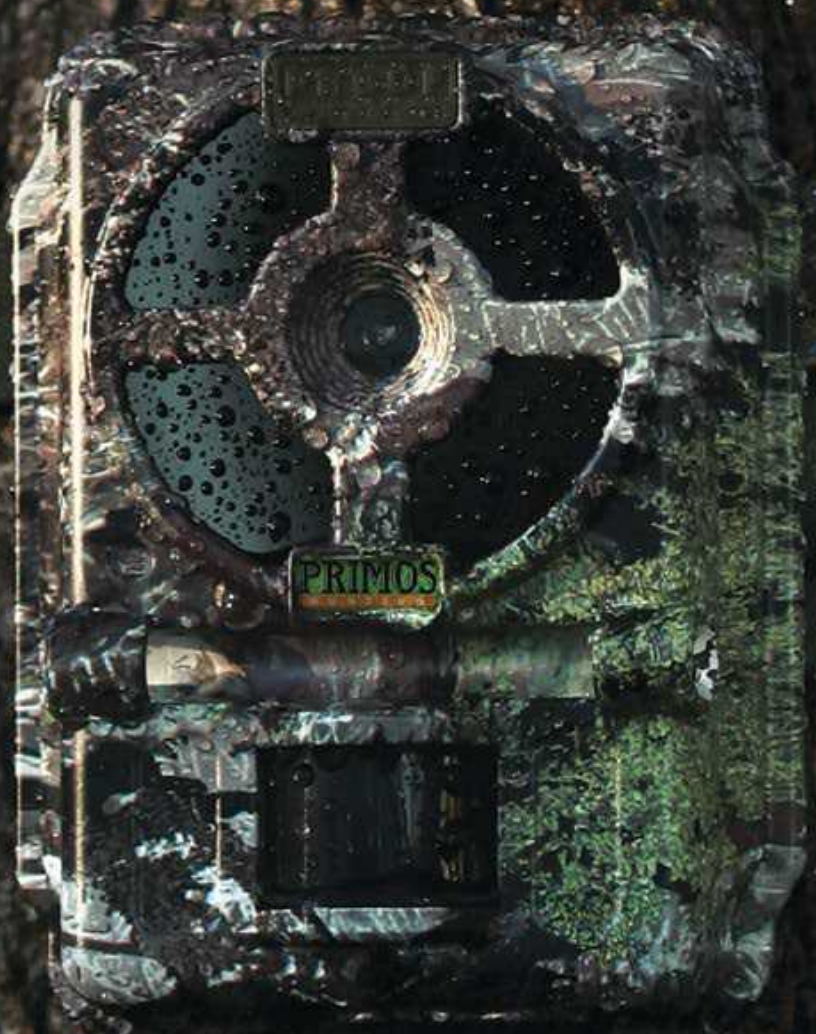
Second, don't place your finger on the trigger until after you settle the pin on the spot. Get used to the sight of the pin on the spot. That will keep you from rushing.

Third, pull the trigger; don't punch it. Shooting a bow is rarely a race — there is seldom an award for getting the shot off fast, only accurately. If the pin drifts off the spot and won't drift back on, take your finger off the trigger, re-settle and then place your finger back on the trigger. Be patient.

Fourth, it's easier to be accurate when commanding the trigger if you don't focus on the pin. Lock your concentration on the spot you want to hit — it isn't moving. When you are looking at a fixed spot, it's much easier to turn down the anxiety in your feedback system and maintain a steady aim. Don't try to be perfect, that will only breed more anxiety.

Last, and above all else, remember your follow-through is extremely important when shooting this way. Focus on what your follow-through should look like with a surprise release and keep steady until the arrow hits.

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BY **BOB HUMPHREY**

The Crossbow's Impact on Deer Populations

Several years back when cross-bows were still a hotly debated topic, I took a look at one of the opponents' chief complaints — how devastating the introduction of crossbows toarchery seasons would be to deer populations.

With the number of states that have more recently come on board, allowing crossbows for some or all of the archery season, I decided it was time to revisit the subject and see if anything has changed.



While the use of crossbows during regular archery seasons has expanded nationwide in recent years, it has had little impact on deer populations.

The Old

When crossbows became legal hunting weapons in 1973, Arkansas hunters bagged 33,794 deer — approximately a 5 percent increase over the previous year. The deer kill roughly doubled over each of the next two decades, and in 2014 hunters killed 208,075 deer, with archery hunters accounting for about 12 percent of the total. That seems like a lot more deer dying, but the statewide deer population has remained stable at around 1 million. According to the Quality Deer Management Association's *2015 Whitetail Report*, Arkansas ranks first in the nation in terms of the lowest yearling buck harvest rate and second for the proportion of bucks age 3 ½ years old or older.

After Ohio eliminated crossbow restrictions for its 1982-1983 season, hunters killed 52,885 deer — about a 10 percent increase from the year before. Over the next decade, the number of vertical bowhunters grew from 82,000-95,000 while crossbow hunters skyrocketed from 11,000-97,000. Concurrently, the deer kill more than doubled to 165,124, with crossbow hunters accounting for an increasing proportion of the total harvest. Last year, archery hunters accounted for slightly fewer than half of the total killed of 175,801 deer, but the deer population and the gun kill have not diminished. Meanwhile, Ohio ranks fourth in the nation in terms of Boone and Crockett and Pope and Young record-book entries.

Georgia's estimated 96,000 vertical bowhunters accounted for roughly 10 percent of the 446,000 deer killed during the 2001-2002 season. When crossbows were legalized the following year, 17,322 crossbow hunters took 4,429 deer, or 12 percent of the total archery harvest. Just two years later, the total archery harvest declined to 30,924 with an estimated 21,454 crossbow hunters accounting for just shy of 20 percent of the archery harvest. While some of the increased archery kill and overall harvest decline could be attributed to more crossbow hunters, a more likely reason is a state management plan calling for deer population reductions in five of the state's nine deer units. This was accomplished largely by extending the firearms season and increasing the antlerless bag limit and the number of either-sex hunting days for firearms hunters. Fear not. Last year, Georgians harvested 453,952 deer from the statewide population of 1.3 million, with archery hunters accounting for 74,490 of those. And much of that was accomplished on the strength of the antlerless harvest, which ranked first in the nation at over 300,000. Antlerless deer represented roughly 80 percent of the archery kill. Georgia also ranked second in terms of the number of antlerless deer per antlered deer harvested.

The New

Following the introduction of crossbows in Virginia for the 2004-05 season, the total kill declined by more than 30,000 — a 3 percent decrease from the 2004 kill but still 4 percent greater than the 10-year average. Vertical bowhunters killed 17,291 deer, while crossbow hunters killed 5,476 (2.5 percent of the total deer kill). However, that decline was by design as well. Through liberalized hunting regulations enacted over the past decade, the state has stabilized the deer herd and achieved its population objective of roughly 1 million. The total annual kill has also stabilized at around 190,000, with archery hunters accounting for roughly 14 percent.

Pennsylvania hunters killed 335,850 deer in 2008, the year before crossbow use was expanded for all hunters during the archery season. The following year's kill was down by nearly 30,000. Meanwhile, the overall archery kill increased from 14 percent of the total harvest in 2007-08 to 20 percent in 2010-11. The

crossbow's proportion of the archery harvest rose from 15 percent in 2007-08 and 2008-09 to 30 percent in 2009-10 and 34 percent in 2010-11. Wildlife authorities subsequently concluded that the slight increase in deer harvest since the addition of crossbows was not unsustainable or counter to the agency's objectives in managing the resources. Since then, an even greater disparity was observed between the 2013 and 2014 seasons, when hunters killed 352,920 and 303,973 deer respectively. However, the archery kill remained around 30 percent of the total for both years.

The most recent example comes from Wisconsin, a long-time bastion of deer hunting. Legalization of crossbows in 2014 and the 47,449 hunters who purchased a crossbow license likely contributed to a record buck bow kill of 46,201. However, with the overall kill down 11 percent and a 2 percent decline in total license sales, authorities considered the impact of crossbows to be minimal. One interesting side note was the mean age of crossbow hunters, 52, compared to 38 for vertical bowhunters. Time will tell if there is any measurable impact, but another nearby state might shed some light.

In Michigan, the proportion of licensed archery hunters using crossbows increased from 19 percent to 37 percent to 49 percent over the first three years flat bows were legal. Despite this, the overall deer harvest of approximately 430,000 has not increased, and bowhunters still account for around 30 percent of the total take. Meanwhile, Michigan ranks second in terms of antlered buck harvest and buck harvest per square mile, and fifth in terms of antlerless harvest after five years of crossbow hunting.

TIP OF THE MONTH

Check the regs — with the rapid pace of change in crossbow regulations, it's important that you keep up to date on when and where they're allowed and what type of restrictions there may be on things such as minimum draw weight and bolt length and the types of sights that are allowed.

Summary

Clearly, increased crossbow use has not resulted in measurable declines in any deer populations. Some decreases have occurred, but they are largely attributed to climatic conditions, disease or changes in state management goals. Meanwhile, crossbows seem to be contributing to a slight increase in license sales and hunter participation, particularly among younger and older hunters, all of which should be considered positive trends for hunting.

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BY **JON E. SILKS**

Mission Hype DT



Mission's Hype DT packs plenty of performance into a highly adjustable package. The F.I.T. cam system offers draw lengths from 19-30 inches, while the deep limb pockets and long limb bolt result in draw weights that range from 15-70 pounds. Parallel limbs, a Dead End String Stop, Harmonic Stabilizer Lite and a Monkey Tail on the string control shock & noise.

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The Hype DT has all the features and technologies of the basic Hype with the addition of dampening technology (DT), which consists of a Dead End String Stop and a Harmonic Stabilizer Lite. Hype and Hype DT bows are rigged with the F.I.T. cam system, Zebra Hybrid string and cables, high-adjustment limb pockets, parallel split limbs and more.

Crazy Adjustability

Probably the most hyped feature on this bow is adjustability, both in terms of draw length and draw weight. It is quite the accomplishment to engineer a high-performance bow that can adjust from 19-30 inches of draw length and 15-70 pounds of draw weight with no other cams, modules, strings or limbs needed. You buy the bow and all of that versatility is yours — or your wife's, or your 10-year-old's, or even your Granny's. This bow will fit almost anyone.

The Hype and Hype DT are both outfitted with Mission's Focused Inertia Technology cam system, which makes the draw-length range possible. By rotating a single module, you can easily change the draw length with no bow press needed. What exactly is Focused Inertia Technology? It works basically the same as their perimeter weight technology in that its mass is strategically located to enhance the reduction of recoil as it moves opposite of the string and cables during the shot, counteracting their momentum. System letoff is advertised at 80 percent.

Along with the great draw-length adjustability, you also get a wide range of available draw weights. After all, someone with a 19-inch draw length is not likely to pull 70 pounds — or even 40, for that matter. The super deep composite pockets and an extra-long limb bolt allow the bow's draw weight to drop all the way down to 15 pounds, and every pound in between. A chart on Mission's website details draw-weight adjustability at each draw length.

Silence, Fun and Comfort

A shooter's overall experience is a culmination of many variables, including performance, draw cycle, grip feel, noise level and more. The Hype DT's molded composite grip is both comfortable and functional. The material provides an insulating layer between the shooter's hand and the aluminum riser, while it's surface condition and shape also encourage consistent hand placement. This grip is designed to produce a neutral wrist position.

Parallel limbs, a Dead End String Stop, a Harmonic Stabilizer Lite and a single Monkey Tail on the string are all focused on reducing shock, vibration and noise. When the bow is shot, the limbs move in the opposite direction of one another, thereby cancelling out much of the leftover shock and vibration typically found

SPECIFICATIONS

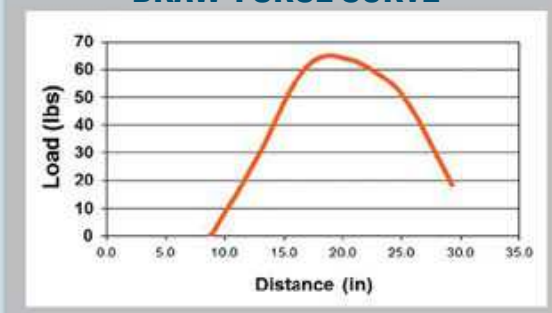
Manufacturer: Mission Archery, 608-269-2728; www.missionarchery.com
Model: Hype DT
Cam System: Focused Inertia Technology (F.I.T.)
Weight: 3.9 pounds (advertised and as tested)
Brace Height: 7 inches
Axle-To-Axle length: 31 inches
Letoff: 80%
Draw Weights: 15-70 pounds
Draw Lengths: 19-30 inches, rotating module
Riser: Reflex, forged and machined aluminum
Limbs: Split, parallel
String: Zebra Hybrid, BCY 452X, 58 7/8 inches
Cables: Zebra Hybrid, BCY 452X, 34 1/16 inches
Grip: Molded composite, one-piece
Finish: Lost AT, Lost OT, Lost OT Pink, Black
Advertised IBO Speed: 323-326 fps
Suggested Retail Price: $399
Comments: A great bow for the right application.

MISSION Archery

THE UPSHOT

	ARROW SPEED	KINETIC ENERGY	DYNAMIC EFFICIENCY
375-GRAIN ARROW	273 fps	62.1 foot-pounds	83.7%
425-GRAIN ARROW	257 fps	62.4 foot-pounds	84%

DRAW-FORCE CURVE



Editor's Note: *Our standardized High Grade testing includes the use of the same equipment and test methods. All bows are tested with a draw length of 29 inches and a draw weight of 65 pounds unless otherwise noted.*

in bows with upright limb angles.

Finally, the F.I.T. Cam's draw cycle is smooth and easy on your shoulders, which makes the bow more fun to shoot. More fun equals more time on the range and more time on the range means you will become familiar with your equipment and your consistency and accuracy will improve.

Impressions

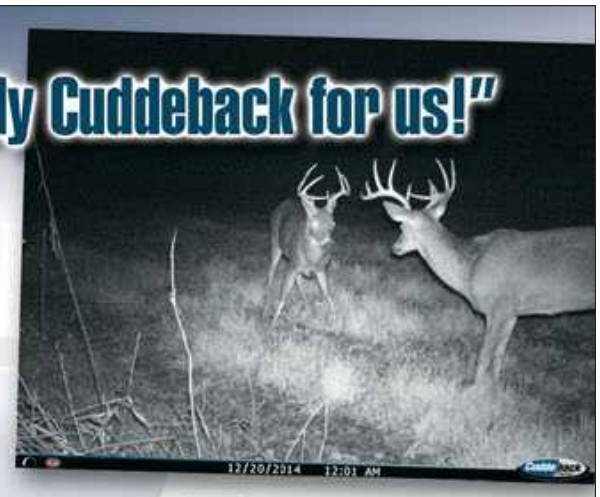
The Hype DT is worth every penny of the $399 asking price, which isn't much compared to many rigs on the market. It gives you an unbelievable range of adjustability and has a very low level of shock, vibration and noise — even when set at longer draw lengths and higher weights. Adding a stabilizer to tame the shot is not necessary.

One potential drawback for some shooters may be the presence of a significant valley, reminiscent of those you might experience 25 years ago — yes, an actual valley! If you are used to a rock-solid back wall that doesn't leave you guessing where your anchor should be, this bow may take some getting used to.

The smooth draw cycle also feels somewhat different, as there is basically no plateau. See the attached draw force curve.

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Ron White – Lancaster, N.H.



"A great picture from a great camera. Thanks Cuddeback."
Mike Jordan – Elkins, W. Va.



"Beautiful color on this camera. Went and bought another. Thanks for such a great little 20 MP camera. LOVE, LOVE, LOVE them!"
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THE Perfect Rut Recipe

When, Where and How to Tag Rutting Bucks



By Bill Winke

It would be nice if we could gaze into our crystal ball and see the actual dates for the "Wild Week" of the 2015 rut. If only it were that simple, we could pin down the best seven hunting days of the year and submit our vacation requests.

In truth, the best we can do is make predictions based on long-term averages. And after 25 straight years of hunting every day of the rut, here are some conclusions I have come to regarding the best days to be in a tree:

Expectation vs. Reality

The "Wild Week" is like a double drop-tine buck. We think it must be out there somewhere, but search as we might it never seems to appear. What we get instead are several wild days, sometimes separated by a week or more.

That is the hardest rut-hunting lesson I have had to learn. To be sure, there are times when those few wild days are most likely to occur, but we will rarely see several of them strung together to make up a magical week. Therefore, our real goal is to pick the week that is most likely to contain at least one wild day.

These action-packed days are tied to doe estrous cycles. When there is a hot doe in your hunting area, every buck is looking for her. The next day, things are much more than likely to be dead in that same area.

So, which weeks are most likely to contain at least one day when the bucks are really on the move? In an effort to answer that for myself, I've observed and studied buck activity throughout the rut for years and talked to a lot of successful bowhunters. I've concluded that year-in and year-out, the single best day of the entire season (north of the Mason-Dixon line) will fall somewhere between Nov. 5 and 11. If I had to pick just one day, assuming cool weather, it would be Nov. 7.

Buck activity and intensity builds during the second half of October and peaks just as the first wave of does come into estrus and just before wholesale breeding begins. In other words, the highest activity occurs when only a small

Iowa bowhunter Mike Sawyer killed this great buck on Field Editor Bill Winke's farm on Nov. 11. The buck was cruising alone when Sawyer called him in. Soon after this date, it is less common to find bucks out by themselves covering ground because they are holed up with does. The greatest number of does come into estrus in the middle of November and that takes most of the mature bucks off the market for several days.



11/11/2008

THE Perfect Rut Recipe



Bill Winke's friend Scott Prucha took this great buck on Nov. 10. It is yet another example of the kind of mature deer that are routinely killed during the period between Nov. 5-11, which Winke believes is the best time to be in the whitetail woods this year.



Bill Winke has shot several very nice bucks either on or near Nov. 7, which he believes is generally the very best hunting day of the year. This buck fell to his bow on Nov. 7, 1995. Many other bowhunters also believe Nov. 7, plus or minus a day, is the prime time to shoot a nice buck.

percentage of the does are receptive but all the bucks are after them. This great crescendo occurs between Nov. 5 and 11 nearly every year. The bucks are ready to go, and now there are enough does in estrus that there is likely to be one somewhere near your stand.

Buck activity actually drops off a few days later when the majority of the does are in estrus at the same time. During this period, the mature bucks are holed up with hot does and aren't moving as much. From that point — until most of the does are bred — buck activity remains hit-and-miss.

Call in sick if you have to, but you need to be in your best stands from Nov. 5-11. That will give you the best possible chance of catching at least one magical day when the bucks go crazy.

The Southern Rut

Trying to pinpoint the timing of the rut in the Deep South is like trying to make pieces from different puzzles fit together to make one image. From Texas to Florida, there are six different recognized breeding periods. The best way to pin down the rut south of 36 degrees (central Tennessee) is to ask a regional game department biologist. Find out when the peak of breeding occurs in your area, and if the weather cooperates, the best hunting days of the season are most likely to fall about a week prior to this date.

The Weather Effect

Temperature works hand-in-hand with rut phase in determining the best hunting days. Bucks won't move much during the daytime if it is unseasonably warm. Temperatures over 60 degrees (in northern latitudes) really shut them down. I'd rather hunt a cold Nov. 14 than a warm Nov. 9. In other words, if you have the option of waiting until the last minute to set your vacation days, watch the weather forecast and hunt when it is cold.

The Moon Effect

The impact of the moon phase on the rut is one of the most hotly debated topics in the bowhunting community. Although I don't claim to be an expert on this topic, multiple research projects have clearly shown that moon phase has little impact, if any, on peak conception dates. For example, the Missouri Department of Wildlife recently conducted a study testing deer fetus sizes over a three-year period. They learned that the peak of breeding occurred on Nov. 16, plus or minus a day, each year.



Moon phase may affect the amount of daylight activity deer hunters see, but numerous research projects have shown it has no impact on the dates when deer breeding occurs each year. Field Editor Bill Winke does not take moon phase into account when selecting his favorite week to hunt.

Despite differing moon phases and temperatures over those three years, the peak breeding date remained amazingly consistent. As a bowhunter, that tells me breeding occurs at roughly the same time each year regardless of outside factors. While moon phase and temperature may affect the amount of daylight activity we see while hunting, they don't affect actual breeding dates.

The Best Week

With that in mind, and based on my own hunting observations and those of my friends, I am going to stick with my prediction that, on average, the best rut hunting in the northern two-thirds of North America will occur from Nov. 5-11.

This year, if you are trying to pick a single work week to schedule your bowhunting vacation, the calendar does not work in your favor. The first good calendar week is Oct. 31-Nov. 8 (counting both weekends). The second one is Nov. 7-15. Deciding which to pick is a tough choice. It is a coin toss, really. Of course, the week with cooler temps will produce more daylight activity, but we don't know that right now, do we?

I will place my bet on Oct. 31-Nov.

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THE Perfect Rut Recipe

8, just because I like Nov. 7 and 8 so much. I would rather have those two days at the end of my hunt (after I have learned a few things) than at the beginning. But that is the 51 percent solution; 49 percent says the next week will be better.

Where to Hunt

To be successful, you have to be at the right place at the right time. The rut is definitely the right time; now for the right place.

By early November, bucks are searching for does aggressively (and the does have not gone into hiding yet) so you need to target the does. Spend as much time as you can watching does go past your stand and soon enough a shooter buck will follow one of them. It sounds too simple, but that really is our rut-hunting goal. However, it is hard to watch does for long before they are watching you instead.

You have to keep the does from knowing you are hunting that area long enough for the right buck to come past. There are many ways to do this, including hunting the fringes of doe concentration areas and hunting funnels between two doe concentration areas.

So, the next step comes down to anticipating where the does are most likely to be at every time during the day and then hunting sensible stands near those locations.

Mornings: In the mornings, does are heading back to their bedding areas. It is always better to set up where the deer are heading toward rather than where they are. So, in the mornings, if you want to see does, you need to hunt back in the cover near likely bedding areas.

One ideal morning stand is on the downwind fringe of a doe bedding area. Just as effective is a good funnel between two doe bedding areas that are close together. Find one of these and you're in the chips. Bucks may cruise through at any time, making this a good spot for an all-day hunt.

Evenings: Around mid-afternoon, does start to move away from bedding areas toward feeding areas. By dark, that is where you will find most of them.



Bill Winke took this interesting buck on Nov. 5. It is just one of many tremendous deer he has killed during the magical period from Nov. 5-11. This buck was checking does in a feeding area in the evening before coming past Winke's stand on a nearby funnel (where deer go around the end of a ditch). Funnels near feeding areas are a great choice for evening stands during the Wild Week.

The best spot for the afternoon hunt is either right on, or just inside the edge of the timber from, an active feeding area. As the does start filtering through, bucks will come here looking. Sometimes I have seen the bucks come to feeding areas even when there aren't any does there, just poking around and sniffing the ground.

In areas where the deer are pressured heavily, I would avoid the open feeding areas and look for alternatives, such as areas where acorns are dropping or even trails leading to the feeding areas. These are spots where a deer might hang back and wait until dark before moving into the open.

All-Day Sits

It is tough to sit on stand from dawn until dark for more than a couple of days in a row, but from Nov. 5-11, you need to carry your lunch because you'd be crazy to leave the woods. Plan to hunt deep in the cover in the mornings and then move to a stand closer to food for the evening hunt. This should help ease the monotony while keeping you in front of the action.

The best time to move is the subject of much debate. I know many hunters who consistently shoot good bucks in the middle of the day. If I had to pick a time, it would be roughly four hours after sunrise, but I would relocate quickly.

As mentioned, one exception to this plan of jumping stands is when you are set up overlooking a good funnel between two doe bedding areas. This spot can be good all day long, so there is no reason to move.



Mike Sawyer with a buck he shot on Bill Winke's farm on Nov. 7. The buck was out in the evening, cruising along a standing cornfield as he looked for does. This is a typical scenario during the peak of the rut.

Hunting Strategies

Start the best week of the season by hunting cautiously. Keep the pressure light by hunting low-impact areas (funnel stands) as you get a feel for the way deer are moving and where they're most active. Then, during the last few days of your hunt, start going for broke and hunting right in the middle of these high-activity areas.

I've put together a hypothetical strategy for hunting a week during the rut.

Setting the stage: I assume you have hunted the area before. You have a feel for where the deer feed and where they bed. You have some

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stands that overlook tons of sign right in the center of the best activity on the property. You have trail-cam photos of at least one buck you would shoot, but are not sure where he travels or when. You just have a general area where he was a few times during the past month.

It is a great start, but all too often, bowhunters jump right on top of where they think that buck might be living or they head right into that stand in the center of the highest activity area. If you are right (or lucky), you are quickly successful, but if you are wrong, your week just got a lot slower as you educate too many deer too soon. I would rather see you move at a more calculated pace.

Day 1: Start the morning hunt in a funnel on the fringes of the buck's assumed core area — something like a creek crossing or a brushy fencerow connecting two blocks of cover. Try to hunt in the general area where you got photos, but don't worry too much about trying to pattern him at this point.



The action in spots like this will likely die off around mid-morning. That is when I would climb down and scout a few field edges for big tracks or possibly put out a couple more trail cameras, maybe even put up a stand or two in easily accessible places. Get all the busy work out of the way so you can focus on hunting the rest of the week.

Your afternoon hunt might be in the same funnel you hunted that morning, or along a heavy trail near a feeding area. I would want to make sure I had a way to get back to my vehicle from that stand without alerting any deer in the area — a tough task without a lot of thought and planning.

Day 2: Now it's time to increase the pressure slightly. Your second morning stand site should be in a funnel between two doe bedding areas. Bucks will use this funnel as they travel from one bedding area to another. Ideally, you can access this stand from a creek or ditch so you can keep a low profile. I would hunt this stand that evening, as well, ideally never climbing down.

Day 3: Maintain steady pressure. Your third morning setup should be overlooking the downwind fringe of a doe bedding area. During the rut, bucks love to check bedding areas in the morning because that's where they find the does.

Climb down in the late morning and check your cameras for any daylight buck activity that might signal your next move. Otherwise, you should quickly move toward an evening stand near one of the feeding areas that does favor.

Day 4: On your fourth day, you should start to get a little more aggressive by hunting any crossings or funnels that exist nearer the highest activity areas that you feel the buck you are hunting might be using. With lots of wary does coming and going through these core area bottlenecks, you run a much higher risk that they will detect you. It is a risk



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Any kind of narrow cover, such as a creek bottom, is a prime travel route for bucks out cruising during the rut. Such spots are easy to hunt without educating deer, and you should plan to take advantage of these spots as much as possible to keep your hunting area fresh for as long as possible.

worth taking at this point. You are halfway through your hunt.

Spend as much time as possible hunting near creeks and ditches, because they offer low-impact entry and exit routes and that will allow you to keep the deer from knowing you are hunting them for as long as possible.

Day 5: It is time to hunt the part of your hunting area that has the most activity. In this case, it might be a heavily used bedding ridge or a creek crossing in a low area between two such ridges. This is typical of most whitetail country. Feeding areas and bedding areas are where you find the does, so that is where you will find the bucks. It is time to hunt these areas more aggressively now.

Morning stands near bedding areas and evening stands near food; that is the key, as you hunt as carefully as you can while still hitting your best spots.

Days 6-9: Time is getting short, and if you educate a few does at this point, you haven't killed a whole week of hunting. By now, your cameras likely have given you some information worth acting on. For the rest of your hunting vacation — be it seven or nine days — stay focused on hunting the best areas and keep checking your cameras every day, if possible.

Remember, don't get lazy now. The last minute of the last day of your rut-hunting vacation is just as likely to produce action as the first minute of the first day. Hunt hard and hunt smart right up the very end.

Conclusion

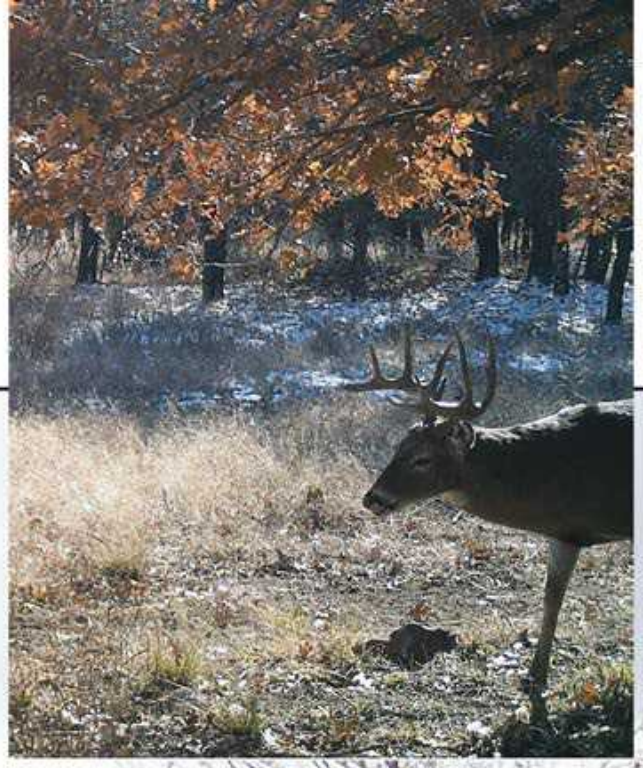
If I could only hunt seven days a year, I'd pick Nov. 5-11. In areas where the doe bedding areas are easy to find, I'd hunt near or between them in the mornings. In areas where they are harder to find, I'd hunt every kind of funnel — especially those between two blocks of cover. In the evenings, I'd hunt near feeding areas.

The annual rut-hunting vacation is the most exciting time of the whitetail hunter's season, but you still need to hunt smart. Don't let the deer know you are hunting them while you put yourself in the places where the bucks go to find does. If you do that for a week, you are very likely to head home with some trophy antlers and a truckload of venison.



Whitetail Odyssey Part 2:

Team Claypool Roars Back from an Early Deficit to Post a Dramatic, Buzzer-Beating Victory



Field Editor Eddie Claypool caught this nice Oklahoma buck on his trail camera well before the season opened and ended up killing the deer on Nov. 22.

SOME POINTS ON The BOARD



By Eddie Claypool

With our 2014 whitetail camp a little lonlier now due to Travis' early departure after filling all his tags, there were fewer excuses to hang around camp and a lot more reasons to put in extended time in a treestand. After all, Peg and I had just gotten skunked in the whitetail game, with a final score of Travis 3, everyone else 0. With mid-November already upon us, we were more than determined to get on the board soon, so we set our sights on some of our best ambush spots and dug in our heels for the duration.

No Holding Back

Early evening of the 15th found Peg headed off to her Oklahoma public-land hunting location, while I headed toward a Kansas public-land spot of my own choosing. I'd prepared this location in the spring-time, after previous years of hunting experience in the area had shown me its potential. A treestand had been placed in early October, and now, with an east wind, it was finally time for me to hunt the spot. Excited about my chances, I climbed aboard and settled in for my vigil.

As darkness settled around my hide, I was yet to spot my first deer. With shooting light gone, I climbed down dejectedly and headed back for camp. It was starting to look like this wasn't going to be a good year for the Captain. I'd been down such a road as this before, and I knew that all a guy could do was to keep his head up and keep plodding forward — it was all up to fate now.

Arriving back at camp, I was met by a smiling face — Peg had scored! Settling into the warmth of our camping trailer, the story unfolded as such... "I had no more than climbed into my treestand and pulled my bow up when I heard something coming through the leaves behind the stand. Quickly scanning that direction, I spotted a nice buck making his way directly toward the scrape that was about 20 yards in front of my tree. I barely had time to get an arrow on the string, when the buck arrived at the scrape and started working it. Quietly and slowly sliding the string back to my face, I knew that I was going to get a shot — that is when I really got excited! Shaking badly, I had to take a deep breath and look away from the buck and his antlers. When I looked back at the buck, I quickly settled my top sight pin on ribs and let'er rip. At that point, I lost all track of what was going on, and almost fell out of the tree from shaking so hard. I thought that I had made a good shot, but I needed some time to calm down, so I sat down and remained there for about an hour. When I climbed down, I found my arrow sticking in the ground, covered in blood. This got me instantly excited again, so I figured I'd better just come back to camp and wait for you to trail him for me."

As the reality of what I'd just heard sank into my mind, I became excited along with my little bride. Peg had been in a two-year drought, and this was an exciting situation to finally find ourselves in. Deciding to wait until morning to pursue the buck, we knew that it was going to be a long night.

Author Eddie Claypool harvested this 10-point Oklahoma buck on Nov. 22, his second buck in four days!

SOME POINTS ON The BOARD



This is Peggie Claypool's Oklahoma public-land buck. The weather was snowy, cold and dreary, but it was still a great time!

First light of the next morning found me excitedly following a good blood trail that led to a beautiful 10-point buck. As we sat on the prairie hillside where the buck had expired, a light snow began to fall. The Claypool clan was now on the board, and it had been Blondie that had gotten us there — I couldn't have been more proud of my girl. Taking hero pictures as the wind-chill dropped and the snow flew, we were living a bowhunter's dream. Blessed to simply be in the game, we relished the moment together. Finally loading the buck into the truck, we headed for camp and some hot chocolate — life was good!

Finish Strong

With Travis gone, and Blondie now basking in the glory of her harvest, the Captain was now odd man out. Was the local "expert" about to go down in flames, obvious shortcomings exposed to all? Was indiscriminate persecution about to be heaped upon the head of one who had been at the top of the pile for so long? Were the scoffers about to feed upon the flesh of nobility? Had pride ultimately led to the supreme fall? As I sweated it out, I clawed for redemption — Captain Ed would not go down without a fight!

Now hunting as a man possessed, I quickly realized that I'd fallen right back into a trap that I'd long ago sworn off — pressure to produce. As I addressed this ugly dilemma from a treestand on the evening of Nov. 18 — my 56th birthday — I vowed to mellow out and simply be happy. Taking a few deep breaths, I determined to focus on what really mattered — faith, health, friends and family. Big bucks could come, or not.

A short hour later, I climbed down early from my evening vigil and stood over the fallen form a nice 12-point buck. The beautiful animal had graced me with his presence shortly after I'd cleared my mind of pressure and dozed off for a nap — nothing like the rustling of leaves and grunting of a rut-crazed buck to serve as a natural alarm clock. What a birthday present, and what an immediate attitude adjustment. As I reflected upon how quickly things can change, I could only shake my head in amazement. So goes the life of a whitetail bowhunter.

The next few days amounted to a hectic time in the lives of two Okie bowhunters. We were both trying to finish strong, thus barely meeting each other coming and going. Short nights, long days and big dreams filled the life of the Claypool clan as it tried to bilk every ounce of goodness from a time so greatly anticipated. Peg was having some good encounters with nice bucks, but had been unable to seal the deal on any of them. With one more tag in her pocket, she hunted on.

On the morning of Nov. 22, I arose early to head to my Oklahoma spot to spend the day in a tree. It was a beautiful autumn day — cool, crisp and lightly breezy. Things just felt right. Taking a lunch to my tree, I climbed aboard and set my mind to the task at hand, as this was going to be a long day. Or not!

By 11 a.m., I'd seen two different nice bucks at a distance, though I'd been unable to entice either near my location with calling. As the midday lull settled around me, my mind began to drift toward the sandwich in my pack when — BOOM — a big buck appeared on the scene just like that. Knowing at first glance this was a good one, I grabbed my old friend Mathews for assistance in the matter at hand. Pooling our abilities, we slipped a broadhead right through the unsuspecting visitor's boiler room. Bounding a few jumps to the side, then surveying the area for a few seconds, the buck simply tipped over within sight — never had a cleaner harvest occurred. I stood in shock, looking at my prize and wondering what had just happened? Had I just taken my second nice buck in four days? Once again, I became acutely aware just how fast things can change.

When Peg arrived back a camp, another specimen awaited her critique. Always supportive, her praise warmed me inside. The Captain was back on the scene in full force, reasserting his manhood; from humble pie to pride pudding in short order!

With a short break for the Thanksgiving holiday, Peg and I headed to the in-law's to feast on yard bird. With full bellies, and grip-and-grin pictures to pass around, the stories flowed. As darkness finally began to settle on Thanksgiving day, however, that old, familiar call tugged at our guts — time to get back in the woods. Heading back for base camp, we were into the home stretch.

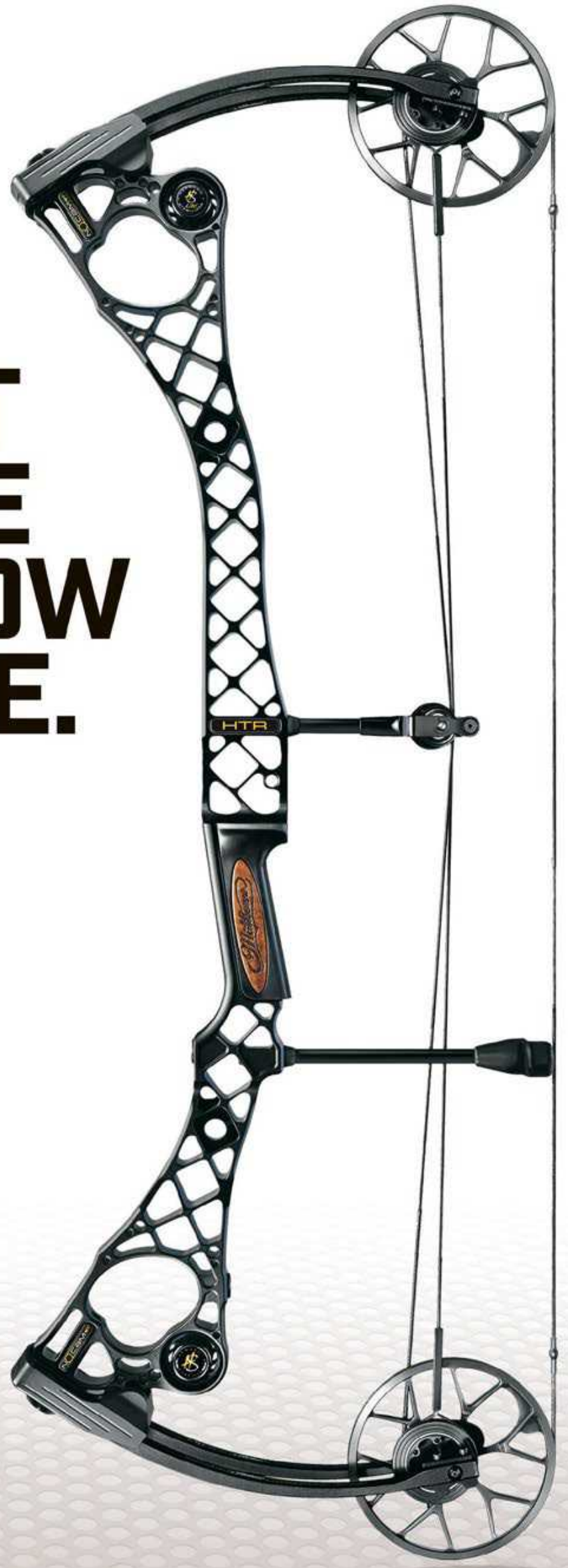
The Home Stretch

Two short mornings later, I climbed aboard a treestand that I'd been saving at my Kansas public-land spot. I had a good feeling about this day, as conditions were favorable and the location of this stand made it a prime candidate for good midday action, since it was in an isolated area of thick cover.

Spotting a couple of does and a small buck during early morning times, I remained on high alert, fully hoping to see a mature buck at any moment. Around 11:30, a flash of distant movement set me on full alert. Peering intently through the dense

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Eddie Claypool capped his 2014 whitetail season two days after Thanksgiving with this fine, public-land Kansas buck. It was his third trophy buck of November.

woods, I soon realized there were good antlers moving through thick brush, so I immediately prepared for any action that might present itself. The buck was clearly trolling for hot does, and as he wound his way through the surrounding cover, it quickly became clear that he was going to come within bow range of my hide. Slowly and methodically the buck cased the entire area for scent of a nearby doe. By the time he glided past my location at 20 yards, I was fully prepared for the moment at hand. A few short seconds later, my third whitetaill buck had been dispatched. Slumping back to my seat, emotions flooded my body — amazing how fast things could change. I was completely humbled by my good fortune, as this was too good to be true. Climbing down, I handled the antlers of a gorgeous, public-land 8-pointer.

When Peg arrived back at camp from her evening hunt, she could only shake her head in disbelief. We were blessed and we knew it. All of a sudden, we'd leaped into the lead at 4-3 — Travis wasn't going to believe this.

But then again, as we thought about the reality of such a fact, who *would* believe it? Six mature whitetail bucks, taken by three redneck bowhunters, completely DIY, mainly on public land, in two states, in one month. Certainly, we'd never experience anything like this again…



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USE IT or LOSE IT

By Christian Berg





Five Reasons to Fill Doe Tags During the Rut





BOWHUNTING Editor Christian Berg killed this big doe (far left) after it walked directly underneath his ladder stand on Nov. 3, 2014 — the first morning of his annual Illinois rut hunt. The following morning, he took this handsome 8-point buck from a different ladder stand only 100 yards away from the first.

LINDA ARNDT PHOTO

Bowhunters come in all shapes, sizes and styles, but when it comes to the whitetail rut, we can neatly be divided into just two categories: those who shoot does and those who do not.

You can place me firmly in the doe-shooting category, and though I don't have any official statistics to back it up, my sense is that puts me firmly in the minority. Based on personal interactions with literally hundreds of bowhunters in deer camps across America, even those who gladly target does during the early or late seasons are reluctant to do so during the peak of the rut out of fear it will diminish their odds of tagging a trophy buck.

I disagree; and in this article, I am going to lay out my case for punching doe tags even when the big bucks are on the prowl.

A Few Caveats

Before I dive any deeper into this potentially contentious topic, let me offer a few disclaimers.

First, I realize some of my bowhunting brethren simply have no desire to shoot does, period. That is fine. One of the great things about bowhunting is that each person is free to choose his or her own path. It is not my job to tell you what to think or do. I am simply sharing what I think and do in the hope it may help others who wrestle with this topic.

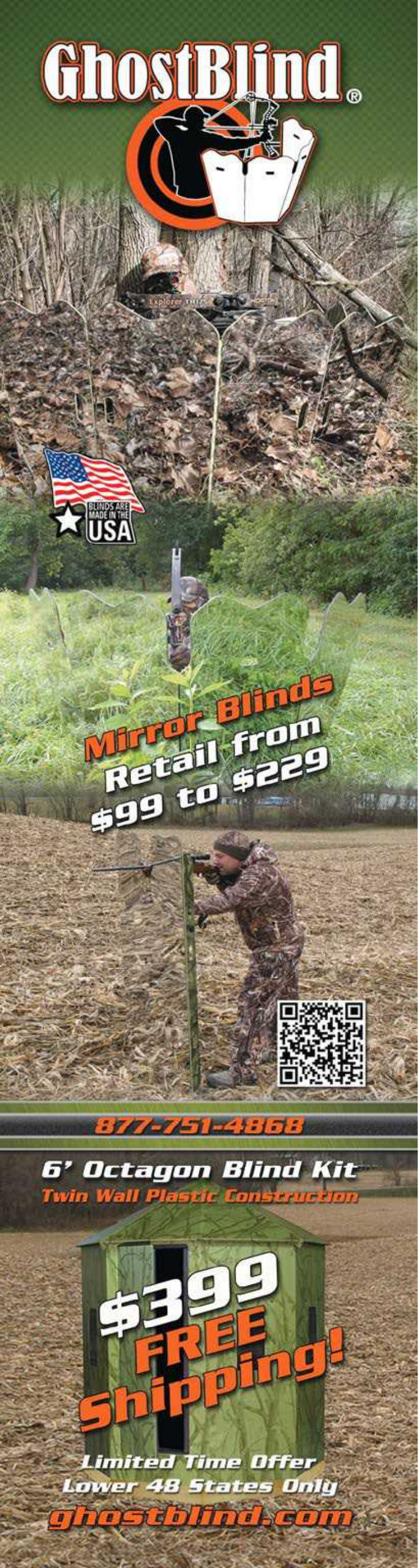
Second, I recognize there are many areas where deer numbers have declined significantly over the past decade. In such areas, doe hunting may need to be curtailed or eliminated to allow the herd to grow. For the purposes of this article, let's assume we are hunting in areas where a substantial doe harvest is needed to stabilize or reduce the local deer population.

Third, please don't assume that just because I hunt does during the rut it means I fling an arrow at every one that walks into bow range — far from it! Rather, I am a doe-hunting opportunist during the rut, gladly pulling the bowstring when the *right* opportunities arise. By right, I mean I look to take mature does (this helps eliminate accidentally shooting button bucks) that offer close-range, broadside or quartering-away opportunities in settings where I can observe the woods and feel confident I will not disturb the area by taking the shot.

Obviously, I would not shoot a doe with a rutting buck on its tail. Nor would I shoot a doe out of a food plot where multiple deer have gathered and risk spooking a shooter buck by clearing the plot. However, a lone doe or family group of antlerless deer in a relatively open area that allows me to make certain no other deer are approaching presents what I consider a prime opportunity.

I experienced just such a scenario last Nov. 3 during my annual rut hunt at River Bottom Bucks in Coles County, Ill. I was sitting in a ladder stand on a small, hardwood finger ridge adjacent to a cattle pasture when a giant, corn-fed, Midwestern doe showed up, accompanied by two yearlings. There were no other deer in

Many bowhunters choose to let does walk during the rut, but there are plenty of good reasons to target does even while waiting for a trophy buck to cruise past your stand.





CHARLES ALSHEIMER PHOTO

In areas with too many deer, taking does during the rut may be necessary in order to reach overall harvest goals. Helping farmers reduce the amount of damage they suffer can go a long way to ensuring continued access for next year.

sight, and over the course of about 20 minutes, the three deer contentedly fed in my direction until they were literally standing at the base of my ladder, without the slightest inkling I was there. Unwilling to let such a golden opportunity pass, I came to full draw, released my arrow and watched as the doe ran about 25 yards and expired within sight.

Selecting extremely high-odds shots is critical, because while shooting does during the rut won't spook other deer, making a bad shot and spending the day tramping through the forest to recover your doe absolutely will. In this case, the disturbance caused by recovering my doe was essentially nil. The next day, I shot a handsome 8-point buck from a different stand less than 100 yards away, and by the end of the week, three of my friends had shot even larger bucks than mine in the same general area. Clearly, taking that doe hadn't spoiled our hunt, and I was more than happy to head home with twice as much venison as the others!

Another bowhunter who shares my point of view is biologist Dr. Grant Woods, *BOWHUNTING's Whitetails* columnist and one of the nation's most respected authorities on deer management. "I don't think shooting does during the rut is a negative," he said. "I think it's either neutral or a positive."

In fact, when it comes to tagging does during the rut, Woods may be even more liberal than I am.

"The *only* doe I am not going to shoot during the rut is if there is a shooter buck five yards behind her, and that's only because I don't have time to reload that quickly," Woods said. "I don't worry about the shooter buck that's 20 minutes behind her. He's coming around anyway."

To back up his stance, Woods relayed the story of a 6,000-acre South Carolina property he managed for 11 years. The area was overpopulated with deer, and as a result, Woods took every doe that presented him with an opportunity but selectively harvested only fully mature bucks.

"About 25 percent of the mature bucks I harvested were taken during the same hunt (often within the same hour) and from the same stand where I had taken a doe," he said. "If she is in estrus, don't you want that doe staying around your stand?"

So, with that said, here are my top five reasons for filling doe tags during the rut:

Herd Management

Bowhunting is a passion we pursue for many reasons, but never forget that hunting is a critical wildlife-management tool. Wildlife agencies establish annual seasons, bag limits and license allocations to balance the deer population with available habitat, and each of one of us shares a certain level of responsibility for helping accomplish that.

My non-resident Illinois deer license comes with two tags — one for an either-sex deer and one for an antlerless deer. So clearly, the state is encouraging visiting bowhunters to do their part for herd management. And with fewer than a dozen clients hunting at River Bottom Bucks

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USE IT or LOSE IT

each fall, Outfitter Bob Blair doesn't discourage hunters from using both their tags.

In my home state of Pennsylvania, I hunt on several farms that experience significant crop damage from deer each year. So, even though my main focus is trying to connect with a mature buck, those landowners rightly expect me to do my part to protect their corn and soybeans — even if those does cross my path in November.

Time Constraints

Some bowhunters have plenty of time to spend in the field. But for most of us, hunting time is limited.

When traveling out of state, there are usually only five or six days to hunt, and if an antlerless tag is included with your license as it is in Illinois, Iowa and other states, it becomes a very real "use it or lose it" scenario. Personally, when I consider the cost of those non-resident licenses — more than $450 in Illinois and more than $550 in Iowa — it is not a question of whether I can afford to shoot a doe during the rut but a question of whether I can afford *not* to!

Even when hunting close to home, time can be precious. Many bowhunters save a week of vacation time for the peak of the rut, and that week may represent the majority of time they have to spend afield for the year. If that is your situation, taking a doe during the rut may be the only opportunity you get.

Meat

I could easily have listed meat first on my list; after all, filling the freezer is one of the main reasons we hunt. As the old saying goes, you can't eat antlers!

As a single man, and even during my early years of marriage, I considered a freezer filled with venison more of a luxury than a necessity. But now, as the father of two boys who can consume hundreds of dollars worth of groceries as quickly as I can place them in the cupboard, the value of a doe in bow range has risen dramatically. And when it comes to quality table fare, a plump, grain-fed, farm-country doe is hard to beat.

Just as state deer biologists set a quota for the total deer harvest, I set a family quota for how much venison is required to carry us through until next season. Each fall offers only so many slam-dunk opportunities to take does, and with many mouths to feed, I can't afford to let many of those opportunities pass if I want to stock the freezer by Christmas.

Experience

Regardless of the pursuit, there is simply no substitute for experience. In bowhunting, you can shoot thousands of arrows in the backyard, but no amount of practice can match the process of taking aim on a real, live whitetail.

Let's put it this way: I can sit in the woods all day and watch does without getting too excited. But the instant I decide I am going to







Illinois bowhunters Cliff Campbell (top) and John Rexroat tagged trophy bucks during Editor Christian Berg's November 2014 rut hunt at River Bottom Bucks in Illinois. Contrary to popular belief, shooting does during the rut will not generally foul your hunting area, so long as the recovery process isn't too invasive.

try to take one of those does, my body flips into "kill mode" and my nervous system goes haywire. It's the same adrenaline rush, elevated heart rate and weak knees that occur when a shooter buck shows up. So, successfully collecting yourself and making an accurate shot on a doe is a great way to build confidence. In the case of last year's Illinois hunt, I can assure you that making a perfect shot on my doe was a great warm-up for taking my buck the following day.

"Settling that pin behind the shoulder is outstanding experience," Woods agreed. "I promise you I am a whole lot better buck shooter because I have a whole lot of does under my belt."

Fun

Last, but certainly not least, successfully taking a deer — *any deer* — is just plain fun. Yes, the entire process of bowhunting is fun, from pre-season scouting and range practice to hanging stands and checking trail cameras. And no, I don't *need* to kill anything to enjoy my time in the field.

Still, there's nothing quite like the satisfaction that comes from successfully executing in the moment of truth. And if I have the opportunity to legally and ethically do that several times this deer season rather than just once, why wouldn't I?

The Debate Continues

When it comes to shooting does during the rut, I honestly do not believe there is an absolute right or wrong answer. As I said at the outset, it's a personal decision, and I certainly respect those who choose to let does walk.

But I also hope this piece helped those folks understand why I believe any time is a good time to fill a doe tag. And for those on the fence, perhaps it will provide enough incentive to go ahead and take a doe this November. You just might end up having more fun and enjoying more venison dinners this winter!

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The Time Is NOW!

By John Dudley

I can't be more excited to see the leaves changing colors. The fresh morning air is cooling off, and I know the dominant bucks of the timber are about to ramp up their daylight activity as they search for potential mates. The whitetail rut is the time of year that makes the other 11 months of the year seem like eternity.

This is what we've saved our vacation days for. This is when we've booked our big, out-of-state hunts. This is why we've spent countless hours shooting arrows in the backyard. The preparations are finally over, and ***NOW*** is the time to make it happen. Mature bucks are about to lower their defenses, and this is the best time to strike. Here's some advice to make sure you are killing it during the rut!

Look to the Moon

When it comes to killing big bucks, I'm a firm believer in the moon phase. And while rut hunting is always good, this year the moon phases have aligned to give us even better evening hunting during the pre- and post-rut periods and the best possible morning and midday hunts during the peak of the rut.

Whenever I am in doubt about high-traffic times for animals, I look to the sky and try to find the moon. My experience is that animals move heavily when the moon is first coming up and also during the last hours before it dips below the horizon. A very good example of this is a few days prior to the full moon. On those days, the moon will be popping above the horizon well before dark, and I can guarantee you deer movement will be heavy on those days. Then, once the moon is full, it starts rising later and later after shooting hours, which is why evening hunts during a full moon can be frustrating.

This year, there are two full moons that will fall within the traditional rutting period — the first occurs on Oct. 27, and the second on Nov. 25. This means that the days leading up to the full moon will be dynamite in both months for evening hunts. The October full moon aligns perfectly with the days when the big bucks typically make their first daylight appearances to check fields for



LINDA ARNDT PHOTO

The rut is the best time of year to tag a trophy whitetail, as bucks driven by the need to breed temporarily lower their defenses. The tips offered in this article will help you make the most of your rut hunting time this year.

Six Strategies for Killer Rut Hunting



The rut is no time to leave your stand mid-morning and head back to camp for lunch! Author John Dudley estimates he has killed 80 percent of his biggest rut bucks, including this Iowa bruiser, between 10:30 and 11:30 a.m.

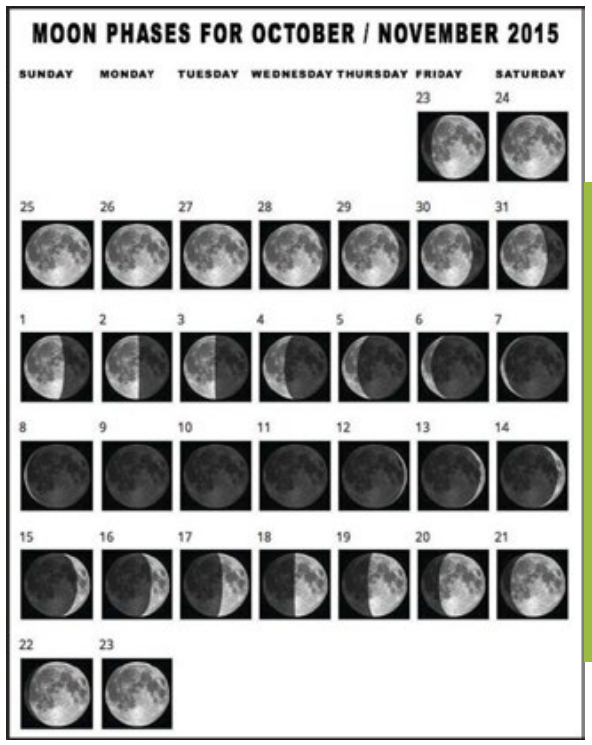
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the area's first estrous doe. Here in the Midwest, I typically start seeing mature bucks the last three days of October, but with this year's moon phase, I predict some great bucks will fall from Oct. 24-26.

Then, a month later when the moon is coming up well before dark in November, the timing is excellent for the time of the rut when bucks really start to cruise and venture into new territories in search of the few remaining receptive does that have not yet been bred. Nov. 22-24 could produce some excellent evening hunting.



Although it is tempting to stay in bed when the weather outside is nasty, bowhunters willing to brave the elements during the rut are often rewarded for their persistence.



This year's moon phases set up perfectly for bowhunters. Full moons in late October and November should produce excellent evening hunts during the early and late stages of the rut, while a New Moon in mid-November should result in tremendous morning and midday hunts during the peak of the rut.

2015 Rut Predictions

John Dudley discusses moon phases and shares his complete 2015 rut-hunting predictions in an exclusive video at: www.bowhuntingmag.com/rut-moon

On the flip side of the full moon is the dark of the moon, which is ideal for the rut because it reduces nighttime rutting activity when bowhunters are out of the woods. This year, the last quarter of the moon starts Nov. 3, with the New Moon falling on Nov. 11. This is perfect timing for bowhunters, who should see some great morning hunts during the peak of the rut.

Sit It Out

This year — more than any of the past few years — you need to commit to staying on stand through the late morning. I feel like each year, when I write about success during the rut, I am obligated to repeat myself on this. If you are out of your stand before noon during the rut, you are making a mistake.

During the rut, mature bucks do essentially only three things — chase does, breed does and look for the next doe. One of the best times to put a kill shot on a monster is while he is on the hunt for a new mate. This normally happens late morning; right after last night's lady has decided to lie down.

Countless bowhunters greatly reduce their odds of success because they don't exercise patience. Get it set in your mind now that you will be in your stand at least until noon. This is a *minimum*. I challenge you to try sitting all day during the peak of the rut for three days straight. I know you will experience things you wouldn't if you just hunted three hours in the morning and then again in the evening. I had three consecutive years when I filled my tags at 11:11, 11:12 and 11:13 a.m. My rule of thumb during the rut is that I never sit down in my stand between 10:30 and 11:30 a.m. I am always standing and ready because 80 percent of my success from 30 years as a bowhunter has come in that time frame.

Beat the Elements

The weather during the rut is unpredictable. It can be one extreme or the other, blazing heat or blinding snow. Regardless, you can be assured the rut will happen. Make this your best rut hunt ever by making up your mind to battle the elements even if Mother Nature is trying her best to keep you at home.

A few years back, I was hunting a certain buck really hard, and I made countless decisions to pass up other great bucks simply because it wasn't the one buck I was after. I hunted really hard, and after a few weeks of 12-hour sits and up and down hunting action, I was starting to wear down. One day, as my 4 a.m. alarm went off, I heard sheets of rain slinging against the roof. I thought, *Oh my, it's raining cats and dogs!* My wife knew what my mind was pondering while laying there in the dark for a few minutes after I turned off the alarm. "Why don't you take a day





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off and recharge?" she asked. I'm not going to lie; that sounded good!

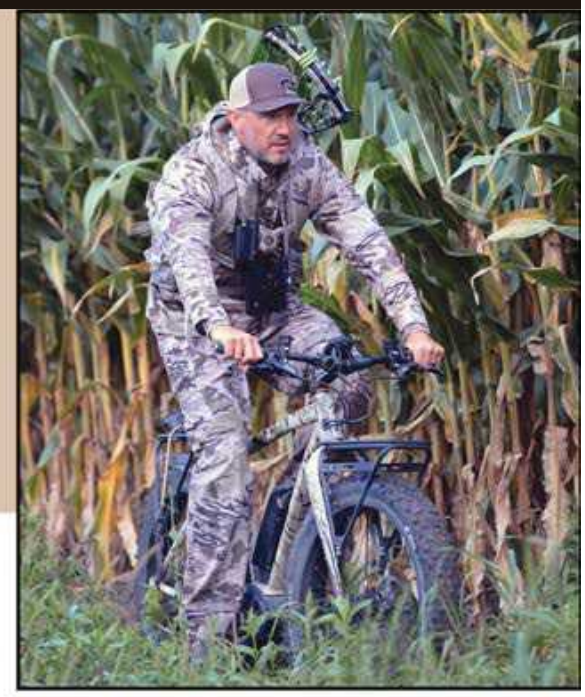
But after a few more minutes, I remembered I had left my decoy and my gear hanging in my tree the evening before since I had a plan to come back and hunt the same spot. I popped out of bed and mentally prepared for a really miserable day. I was soaked by the time I was clipped onto my safety line. But by that point, I figured I might as well put in some time.

Two hours later, the rain slowed a little bit and a thick fog rolled in. By this point, it was almost humorous to me. Then a string of does and fawns stepped out. They looked as wet and miserable as I was as they walked across the CRP field. Then, just about the time they cleared the field, out stepped the granddaddy buck I had been waiting for! I gave him one grunt, and within seconds he was right under me for a shot. I can assure you this story is only one of many I have had through the years of hunting on nasty, nasty days when no one else is out. It is almost as if the big bucks think they are the only ones man enough to take it.

PEDAL POWER

Since deer don't have a usual pattern during the rut, it is sometimes hard to select entry and exit routes without bumping deer that hear you coming. I believe a bicycle is much easier on their ears than a two-legged predator walking to and from stands.

If you hunt on a farm where deer are used to motorized vehicles being used as part of normal agricultural practices, then you shouldn't worry about using a machine to get to your spot.

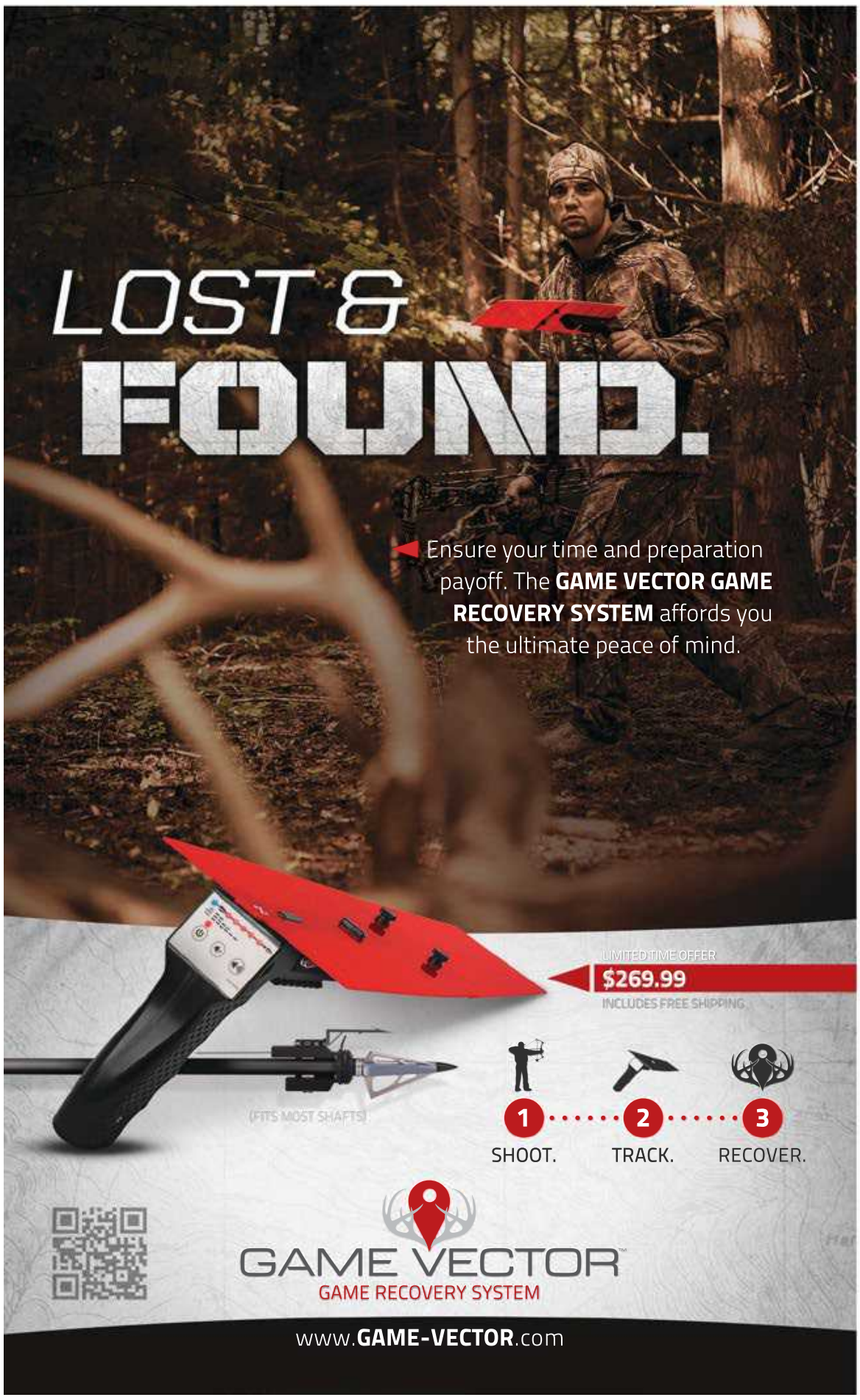


Predicting deer movement during the rut can be tricky, which complicates the process of choosing entry and exit routes between the truck and treestand. Author John Dudley says a mountain bike makes getting in and out quicker and easier while minimizing disturbance to any deer he may pass along the way.

Ignore the Ladies

I started practicing a personal rule many years ago, and I believe it plays a big part of my success. From the end of October to the end of November, I refrain from tagging does unless I have already filled my buck tag. The philosophy on this is simple. If you have lots of ladies around during the rut, then you will also have the bucks as well.

I shot a great buck two years ago on Nov. 1. This buck was noticeably uncomfortable coming to this food



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plot during the early evening. However, he was trailing a doe that was one of the first to come into estrus. She was a big, old doe and one I had seen time and time again earlier in the season. Although I did have a doe tag in my pocket and she did present me with multiple shots, I couldn't help but think she was very predicable and that one day she would have a buck on her tail. Sure enough, it happened and helped me tag a great buck I didn't think I would ever see.

I have learned to enjoy my doe tags during the late season when buck hunting has slowed down a little bit. The weather is more favorable for taking care of your meat and you also aren't burning valuable rut time taking care of a doe. Getting a food plot to fill up with a bunch of girls that are natural decoys will pay off. Leave the ladies alone, and you will get more opportunities at dominant bucks.



A grunt tube is one tool author John Dudley absolutely won't do without during the rut. Grunting is easy to do and extremely effective, often luring distant bucks into easy bow range.

The Essential Tool

One item I won't hunt without during the rut is a grunt tube. Unlike rattling, which can intimidate certain bucks, a grunt is a low-impact call that usually generates a response. Grunting doesn't need to be elaborate or have a certain sequence. A few short grunts with one or two longer ones are all you need. It is one of the easiest deer vocalizations to imitate, and even a beginner can do it right.

I normally make a few grunts in the first moments of shooting light, once I have confirmed there isn't deer already within range. This has been effective for not only quickly calling in a deer to my stand but also relaxing the deer that may have heard me come in to my stand. If you are coming in during the dark,



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David Holder
Co-Host of
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then most deer in the area will only been able to hear you and not really see what you are. A few grunts usually make them associate you with another deer walking around rather than a human.

During the rut, bucks are constantly on the move if they aren't locked down with a doe. A grunt tube is great for grabbing their attention when they aren't within range. If you see a buck and want to attempt a call, then first you should recognize the wind. Once you call, the buck will want to scent check you as it approaches. So, it is best to let the deer travel to a location where, once you grunt, it will have a hard time circling down wind before coming in for a look.

Also, it is my experience that curiosity is what kills the cat with grunting. If you grunt when the buck isn't looking in your direction, it starts to play games in his head. If you call at them and they look but don't respond, then wait for them to look away and do it again quick. You can see it start to play mind tricks on them when they hear something but then can't see it. My grunt tubes have cost me a lot of money in taxidermy bills over the years, I can promise you that!

Too many bowhunters waste time thinking about the possibilty of making a bad shot.

Stay Positive

The last point I want to discuss is that positive thoughts bring positive results. I am not saying that if you visualize a 180-inch buck walking under your tree you can make it happen. But having positive self-talk and visualizing a perfect shot in your shooting lanes can make a big difference.

When I started competing professionally 18 years ago, it was because I wanted to be a deadly bowhunter in the clutch. Competition taught me a lot, and one thing I learned to carry over is a very strong self-confidence in my shot placement and accuracy. I spend a lot of my slow period in a tree mentally rehearsing distances to certain shooting lanes and also visualizing a buck walking into that lane. I picture myself drawing my bow, anchoring, centering my peep, using the right pin and settling the pin right on the heart. I then envision the arrow disappearing right in that spot. When the moment of truth arrives, I have the mentality of "check mate" as soon as I see the buck step into my shooting spot. In my mind, I have already made the shot and he just made the deadly mistake of giving me an opportunity.

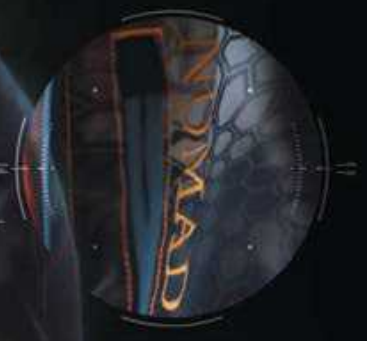
Too many bowhunters waste time thinking about the possibility of making a bad shot. You need to throw any negative thoughts out the truck window on your way to your hunt and start building your confidence instead.



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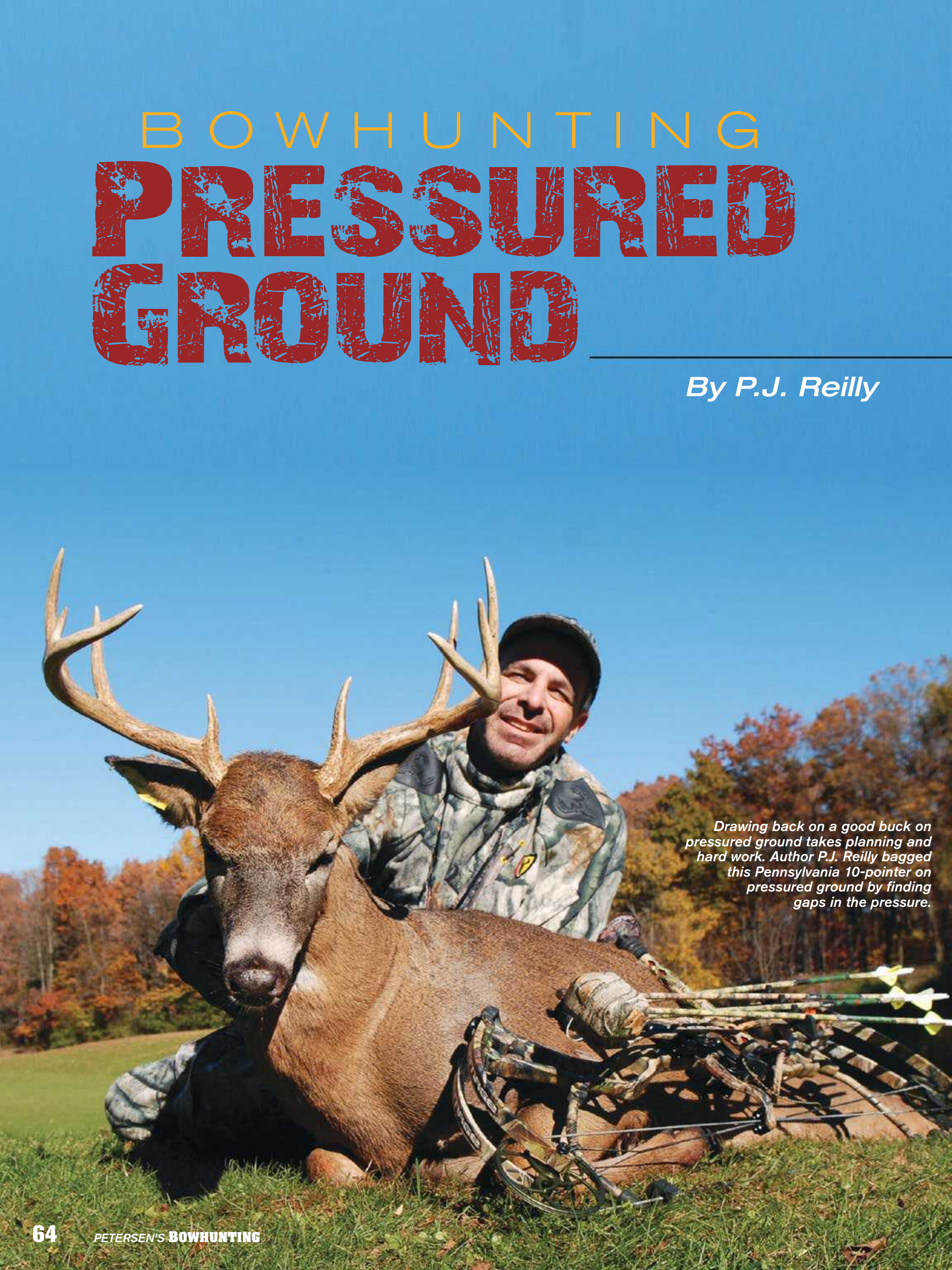
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BOWHUNTING

PRESSURED GROUND

By P.J. Reilly



Drawing back on a good buck on pressured ground takes planning and hard work. Author P.J. Reilly bagged this Pennsylvania 10-pointer on pressured ground by finding gaps in the pressure.



P.J. Reilly shot this Pennsylvania 9-pointer on pressured ground by hunting during the middle of the week, when few other hunters were out.

When Fighting Crowds, Take an Unconventional Approach to Success

Adapt and overcome. Add "improvise" to the front, and you've got the motto of the U.S. Marine Corps. But just adapt and overcome could be the battle cry for those of us who bowhunt pressured ground.

Even in the best conditions, with no hunting competition whatsoever, bowhunting is difficult. You've got to get within spitting distance of one of the wariest critters on the planet. Try doing that when there are other people around spooking deer with their scent, noise and movement and tagging out starts to feel like a fantasy.

You've got to adapt to the pressure and overcome the challenges it presents. In my native Pennsylvania, unpressured ground is almost nonexistent. I have *never* bowhunted a place where I didn't have to deal with other hunters. But I've found a way to be successful under those conditions. So trust me when I say it can be done.

Be 'That Guy'

Your approach to pressured ground should be simple. Whatever it takes. Be willing to do anything.

A 2004 study of hunter movements during Pennsylvania's firearms deer season found that, on average, hunters traveled no more than a half-mile from any road. Also, the steeper terrain got, the fewer hunters that country saw. The bottom line is, most hunters aren't going into places that are hard to reach. Be the guy who is willing to get up an hour earlier than everyone else in order to hike back to those spots.

Another Pennsylvania study of deer activity on public land showed the resident deer didn't flee the state when hunters descended on their territory. They simply adjusted their daily routines to avoid the pressure. You need to be in those places where deer hide.

Hiking a mile through rough, mountain country isn't a simple task. Once you set your mind to do it, get in shape. Run or walk every day to build up your muscles and cardiovascular system.

Be creative. Get one of those carts with big wheels made for hauling deer, like the Ameristep Nontypical. Put your treestand and other gear on the cart for the hike in to save your back. When you come out, if you have a successful hunt, that cart will make deer removal far simpler than trying to drag a deer the whole way.

If there's a river or lake in the area, use a canoe to paddle to unpressured places, or slip on a pair of chest waders to ford a stream. You can almost bet the farm that few, if any, other hunters are accessing spots from the water. Right there, you're doing something the deer don't expect.

When you're attitude is whatever it takes, you'll find a way to get where you need to be.

BOWHUNTING

PRESSURED GROUND

Scout for Hunters

It's easy to say, "Go steeper and deeper," in places where the hunting country is big. But what do you do if the hunting parcels are smaller, the terrain is gentle and there's plenty of road access? Scout for other hunters. Look for treestands and trails marked with flagging tape or reflective tacks — any evidence that indicates another hunter is frequenting a particular area.

My approach to hunting pressured ground is always to find cracks in the pressure. If a spot has hunters, I don't want to be there. It might be a good spot, but I don't want to play the "I was here first" game. You might end up in that situation anyway if another hunter walks in on you unsuspectingly or vice versa. But if you have evidence that others are around, then you know you could run into them.

I go to great lengths to minimize my scent and noise to keep deer from knowing I'm around. Other hunters might not be so careful. If I'm hunting an area other hunters use, everything I do to avoid detection could be moot. Rest assured, on almost any piece of ground, it's likely there are places hunters avoid. The deer know where they are, and you need to find them.

The first place I always look for is the thickest, nastiest patch of cover. You'd be surprised how a big-racked buck can snake into such places. If it's legal, trim a narrow path into such cover to a tree where you can hang a stand and get above the tangles. Don't overdo it. You don't want other hunters to find your honey-hole. Selectively cut just enough branches to allow you to slip through. Overlook nothing. There could be a tiny cluster of trees out in the middle of a field that everyone walks past because it looks worthless. That's just the kind of place where a mature buck might go once the pressure is on.

In 2004, Pennsylvania bowhunter Lester Zimmerman shot a monster 15-point buck that made the state's record book by hunting from a stand he placed in a fencerow sticking out into a cornfield. The whole area where Zimmerman was hunting saw a lot of bowhunting pressure, but no one except him hunted that fencerow.

If you scout and scout and it seems you just can't find a place that's devoid of hunters, then study their travel patterns to see if you can use their activity to your benefit. My brother-in-law had great success bowhunting a state park when he canoed across the lake to get to a wooded peninsula a good two hours before daylight. This finger of woods was not terribly remote, but by approaching it from the water very early, he could get into position at the very tip before other hunters walked in from the road. Often, they pushed deer out the peninsula, which funneled them right to his tree.



If you see a treestand already hanging on pressured ground, keep moving to find your own spot.

Also, hunt during the week. I'm always amazed how little competition I find on pressured ground simply by hunting weekday mornings. Lots of folks get out of work early enough for evening hunts, but I usually have mornings to myself.



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PRESSURED GROUND

Hang or Climb?

Once you find a suitable hunting spot, you'll face a decision. Do you hang a stand, which others can easily see, to sort of stake your claim on that spot? Or do you take care to keep that spot a secret and only hunt from a climbing stand? There are pluses and minuses to both strategies.

On the one hand, many hunters will see a hanging stand and move on to find another spot, leaving this one for you. But there are some who won't. There are hunters who will see your stand, figure it's in a good spot, and purposely hunt on top of you. That's one of the pitfalls of hunting pressured ground.

A climber allows you to hunt a spot without leaving any evidence of your presence when you're not hunting. Unless someone sees you in your stand, they won't know where you're hunting. But that opens the door for another hunter to find your spot, figure no one is hunting it, and set up a stand or mark it for a climber.

The only way to truly know which approach is best on the property you're hunting is to try both and see what happens. On pressured ground, you can't control who hunts where.

Walk Away

Now, everything we've talked about up to this point has focused on getting you into a productive spot. Are you ready for the most difficult aspect of bowhunting pressured ground? Be willing to give up that spot.

If someone moves in on you, don't be stubborn. Move out. It's hard and it's going to hurt. But what good does it do to sit defiantly in your stand if the deer now avoid that area because of pressure from others?

I once put three years into finding and then figuring out how to hunt a funnel between two patches of thick cover on private land where a lot of people had permission to hunt. Where I hung my stand, the landowner wanted no gun hunting. That suited me perfectly. And it seemed all the other guys on the property stayed away from it, because they wanted to find spots where they could hunt with bow and gun.



Using chest waders to ford streams can put you into spots other hunters won't bother with. There are always places in the woods that other hunters avoid. It's up to you to find them.



Hanging a fixed-position stand and leaving it up might encourage other hunters to leave your spot alone. Or, it might tip them off to your good spot.

The third year I hunted that spot, I finally figured out how to get into my stand without walking through deer. My hard work paid off the second week of November when I snaked an arrow between the ribs of a fine 10-point buck.

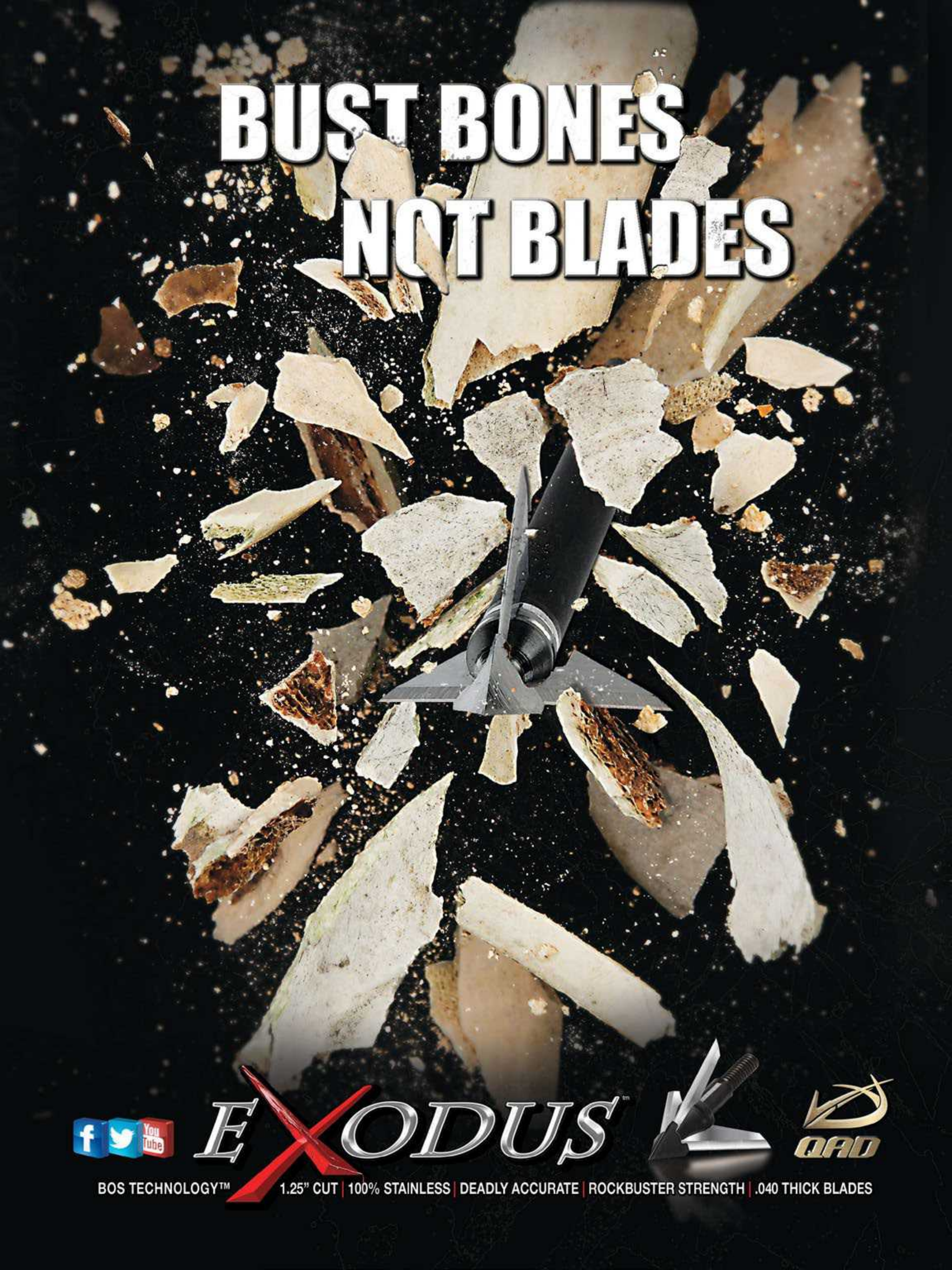
Another hunter who had permission to be on the land saw me hauling that buck out of the woods. The next year, he planted a ladder stand 25 yards directly in front of my tree. He even took two reflective tacks off my tree to mark his own stand. He flat-out told me he saw me haul my buck out the year before, and that he followed my cart tracks back to my stand.

"I figured this must be a good spot," he said.

He bumped deer constantly walking in to his stand and boogered that spot good. As much as I hated to do it, I moved. Do I think he was totally out of line? Absolutely. Was there anything I could do about it? Nope. He had as much right to be there as I did. Don't get trapped by an emotional connection to a spot. Give it up if someone else moves in, but keep tabs on it. You might get to move back in if the invader moves out. But don't waste your time trying to win a battle of wills with someone who is willing to encroach like that.

Just because a piece of property sees a fair amount of hunting pressure doesn't mean it's worthless. If you see good deer in there when hunting season is off, or it's the only piece of huntable land you can access, figure out a way to hunt it and be successful. You might have to think outside the box, but if that's what it takes, then so be it.

Adapt and overcome.


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The POLAR BLAST

By Greg Brush

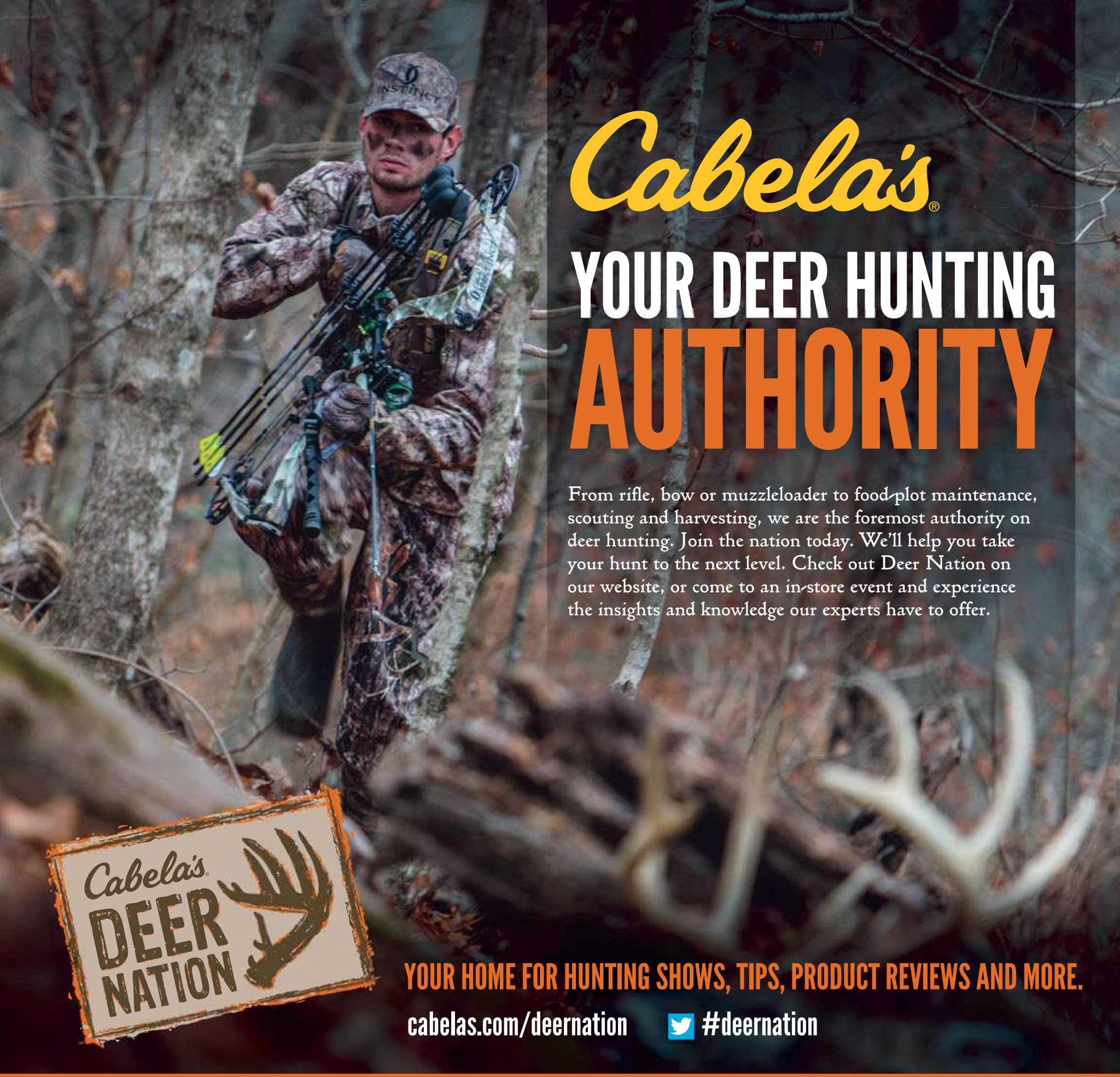
Perseverance Pays Off for Annual Father/Daughter Bowhunt



As a professional fishing guide in Alaska, I know timing is everything. If you fish our area when the salmon return, you can experience the best fishing of your life. Over the years, I've found bowhunting to be quite similar; put yourself in the right place at the right time and incredible things can occur. So, when I began planning my annual father/daughter bowhunt for whitetail deer, I wanted to make sure our timing was perfect. After all, if I was going to pull my daughter Kendra from high school, fly thousands of miles and sit in a tree with her, I wanted as much action as possible and good odds of watching her arrow a mature buck.

In the Midwest, the rut provides all this and more every November. Hunting an entire month, however, is not an option for most hunters, especially when the person with the bow in hand is a 17-year-old, freshly yanked from English Lit class! When planning a trip of this magnitude, consulting a guide you trust is always wise. When I asked my friend Richard Blakeslee of Triple Creek Outfitters in St. John, Kansas, for a specific one-week timeframe, there was no hesitation.

Despite bitter cold and high winds that made simply drawing her bow a challenge, Kendra Brush overcame the elements and arrowed this great 8-point buck duing her November 2014 Kansas rut hunt.



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The POLAR BLAST

"I'd hunt the week of Nov. 11-16 if I were you," he said. "Most hunters don't know that the timing of the whitetail rut remains pretty consistent year to year due to photoperiod (the amount of daylight). It's weather that dictates the intensity of the rut during daylight hours. Bring your daughter mid-November, pray for cold, nasty weather and you will do well!"

Now Richard isn't your ordinary high-dollar, tell-you-what-you-want-to-hear outfitter who just wants to fill his calendar. The previous fall, when Kendra arrowed a nice, Pope and Young-caliber buck with him, had proven that. We found Richard and his lovely gal Lori to be good, down-to-earth people who not only fed us well and made us feel right at home but provided us with gobs of prime private land, ideal stand sites and plenty of big buck sightings. So when a proven guide says, "Come now, and pray for cold weather," that's exactly what we did!

Here It Comes!

Arriving at the Wichita airport to 70-degree weather would have been a pleasant surprise to two Alaskans if we were simply tourists on a sightseeing vacation. As serious bowhunters though, it wasn't quite the weather we had prayed for. Nonetheless, Kendra and I gathered her bow and what, at the time, seemed like extremely excessive cold-weather clothing and headed out of town.

Flipping through the radio stations in our vehicle, I chanced upon a weather report, but didn't pay much attention to it until two words leapt out of the truck's speakers and smacked me across the face like an icy Alaska wind. The meteorologists were calling for a large pocket of extremely cold air that typically sits over the polar region to become dislodged and roar across the central United States. In their words, a "polar blast" was headed our way.

Having a tech-savvy teen as a co-pilot has its merits, one of which is an instant weather check on her sacred



Greg and Kendra Brush woke to fresh snow halfway through their November 2014 Kansas hunt, adding yet another obstacle to the unseasonably cold temperatures and high winds.







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The POLAR BLAST

smartphone. What Kendra soon discovered was shocking, almost unbelievable — our T-shirt weather was about to vanish as temperatures were forecast to drop below freezing overnight.

Sure enough, we soon saw numerous signs that the weather people really do know their stuff. Several blowing tumbleweeds racing across the highway, darkening skies on the horizon and a plunging truck thermometer that confirmed the forecast. In less than the hour and a half it took to reach Richard's quaint lodge, the temperature had plummeted more than 30 degrees to a more "hunt friendly" 39 degrees.

No doubt these two Alaskans had brought a polar blast south with them!

Despite a 4:30 a.m. wake-up call, I



jumped out of bed like a 7-year-old on Christmas morning. We were in Kansas bowhunting big whitetails during the peak of the rut! Kendra was a bit less enthusiastic. Like most teens, she isn't much of a morning person, so I shook her a second time, grabbed a cup of coffee and stepped outside to see what was before us. Struggling to open the front door should have been my first clue, but it wasn't the strong wind that surprised me as much as the 18-degree temperature!

Immediately returning to our room, I advised my slow-moving young archer to, "Dress warm, honey!" The polar blast had arrived and our first sit was surely going to be a cold one!

Identifying Our Goals

Bowhunting whitetails from a treestand is a curious mixture of extreme, contemplative quiet time, occasionally interrupted by sudden bursts of action. For hours you may see nothing more than a cardinal or pesky squirrel, then deer magically appear before your eyes.

Once Kendra and I were completely settled into one of Richard's well-placed setups, I took the serene pre-dawn moment to not only dream of big bucks, but to also consider what my daughter's goals were.

Kendra and I knew we were in The Land of the Giants. A Boone and Crockett-class buck could step out at any moment, as could an unbelievable "magazine cover" non-

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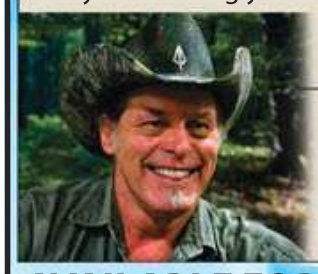


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Triple Creek Outfitters owner Richard Blakeslee, left, poses with Kendra Brush and the 8-point buck she shot during her frigid November 2014 Kansas rut hunt.

typical like Richard's 2012 bow kill. The previous evening, Richard had shown Kendra and me trail camera photos of several 160-inch 10-pointers that had been routinely cruising the cedar-studded shelterbelt we now sat in.

I thought of the conversation Kendra and I had shared on the southbound plane. When asked about this year's goals, she was quick to say, "I'd like to kill a buck over 150, but really I just want to arrow something bigger than last year's buck and have fun doing it!"

And so our goals were set — we would have fun bowhunting together and try to hold out for at least a 150-inch buck.

The next two hours were quite the eye opener. The previous fall, Kendra and I had hunted in more typical November weather, where 35-45 degree temperatures had allowed brief, whispering chats, ccasional snacking and periodic texting to help pass the time between deer sightings. This year, however, it quickly became apparent that none of this would occur. Being bundled up like the Michelin Man severely impacted dexterity, and the frigid winds of the polar blast prohibited pulling down your facemask or removing your gloves to text. Worse yet, cold feet soon turned into blocks of ice that felt like ice picks were chipping away at them.

That morning, despite the severe weather, numerous deer were spotted — just not that special buck worthy of Kendra's arrow. By 9 a.m., Kendra and I were driven from our tree by the unbearable cold and relentless wind. We wanted to sit longer, but it just wasn't possible. Time to come up with another plan!

Colder Than We Thought

Our Plan B was simple enough; just add another layer, right? A heavy neck gaiter, a new facemask and thicker socks would surely allow us to sit the necessary hours to see Kendra's big buck. But that evening, it quickly became apparent that Plan B wasn't going to work either. As a good friend in Texas once told me, "If Plan B was any good, it



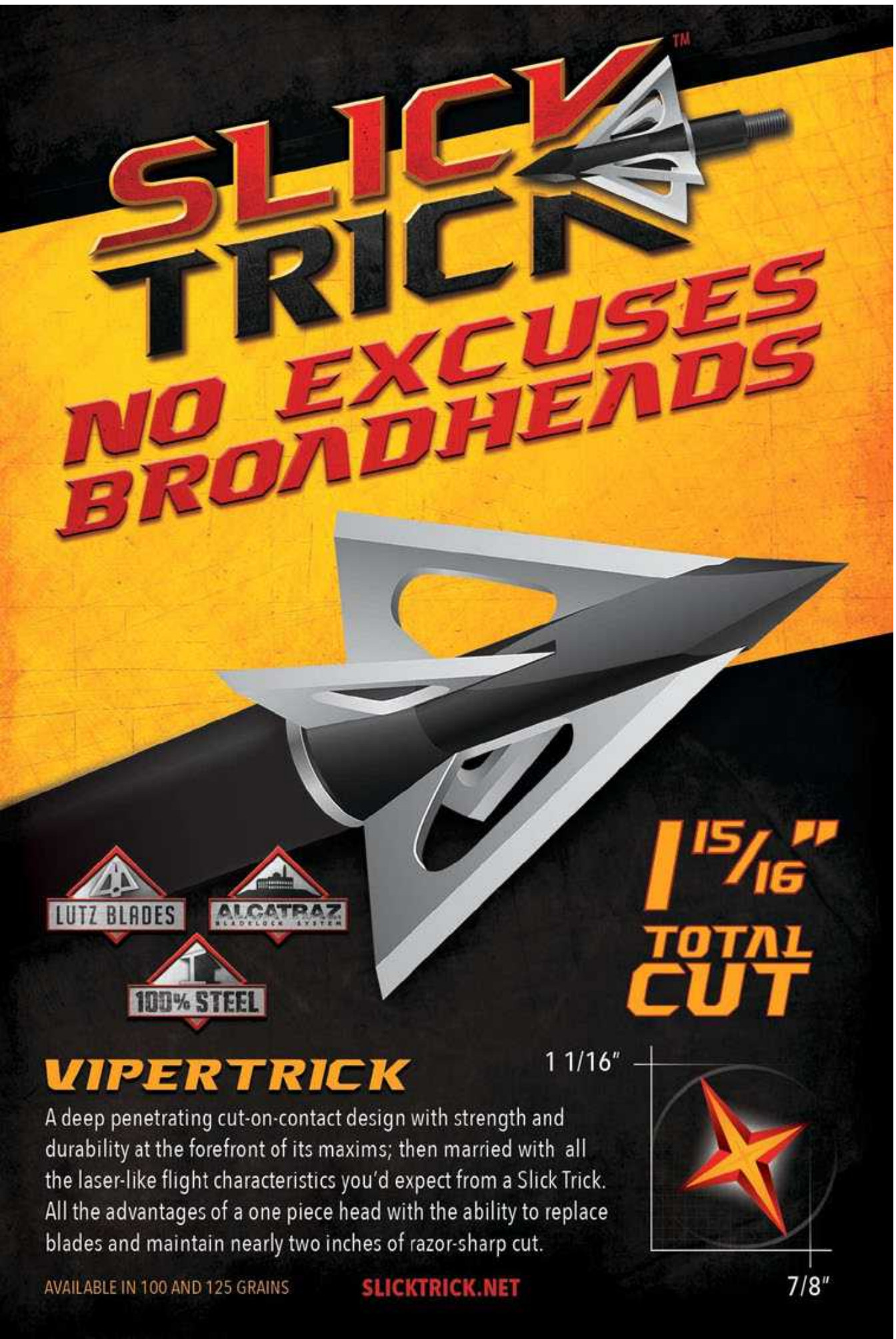
The POLAR BLAST

would have been Plan A from the get-go!" These hearty Alaskans just couldn't stay warm and cozy, but it was another more serious problem that revealed itself that evening.

At last light, just prior to climbing down from our perch, I instructed Kendra to "shoot that bright yellow leaf directly below you." Frequent practice during a hunt is important, but I also wanted to see if her bulky clothing, double hoods, facemask and neck gaiter would negatively affect her otherwise impressive accuracy.

Kendra picked up her bow, adjusted her stance and began to draw in a slow, deliberate motion. Halfway through, though, her otherwise smooth draw came to a screeching halt just prior to her cams breaking over.

Two, then three attempts were met with the same disappointing results. Kendra's cold, stiff muscles simply could not bring her 45-pound Elite to full draw. This polar blast was proving to be a very formidable foe, and so we solemnly returned to the lodge to make more adjustments.



Foiled Again!

The next morning, after turning Kendra's limb bolts down a half turn and commandeering heavier gloves, thicker long johns and charcoal toe warmers, we quietly snuck into the same double set-up. Richard's right-hand man, Andrew Seymour, had been pulling trail camera cards all week, revealing good daytime movement by numerous "shooter bucks" in our area.

Once again, however, frozen

DRESS FOR THE

"But you're from Alaska – you should be used to this!" said the well-intentioned bowhunter from Florida.

To be honest, I can't tell you how sick I get of hearing this. Newsflash, people – we don't live in an igloo, and our thermostat is set at 70 degrees just like yours! My point is that cold is cold, no matter where you're from. If you're going to try to sit idle for several hours in extreme temperatures, regardless of where you live, here are some suggestions:

1. Heat escapes mostly from your head. Wear a heavy stocking cap with a neck gaiter or balaclava to not only stay warm, but to prevent the wind from going down your neck.
2. Dress your torso in layers and stay away from cotton, which doesn't wick moisture well. Under Armour ColdGear tops and bottoms followed by synthetic hoodies, vests, and heavy jackets work well for mid-layers. Cabela's Wooltimate and Berber with WindShear are some of my dad's favorite heavy exterior fabrics.
3. Insulated bibs are far superior to simple pants since they really protect the small of your back.
4. Light- to medium-weight gloves with an insulated hand muff, stuffed with plenty of charcoal hand warmers, allow you to shoot better than bulky gloves or mittens.
5. Boots with at least 1200-gram Thinsulate are required. However, next fall my dad and I will have 2000-gram boots for added comfort. Thin

extremities after just two hours prompted a blunt text to Richard. As much as I hated to, my numb fingers pounded out the disheartening message. "We are ready to be picked up." Temperatures of 15 degrees and sustained winds of 25-30 mph equated to a wind-chill temperature of nearly 25 below — more than enough to force another early departure.

That evening, knowing Kendra and I couldn't last the four to five hours that would surely boost our odds of success, we bundled up as best we could and headed out. Kendra wasn't complaining, but like her old dad, her confidence was slowly eroding.

An hour later, a mature doe passed, closely trailed by two medium bucks that were clearly thinking romantic thoughts. The rut was kicking and bucks were on the move, but where were one of those big 10-pointers when we needed them? At last light, I once again asked my shivering teen to try another practice shot. To our disbelief, Kendra could not bring her bow to full draw. Dejectedly climbing down before last light faded, I thought about many things: What if a big buck had stepped out five minutes prior? Was my hardcore bowhunter as frustrated as I was? Most of all, I wondered if we had grossly underestimated the unrelenting wind and extreme cold of this dreaded polar blast.

Meant To Be!

The following morning I noticed a subtle but clear sign — Kendra and I were both slow to rise. Enthusiastic

EXTREME COLD!

By Kendra Brush



Despite an arctic air mass that made it impossible for Kendra and Greg Brush to keep warm on stand, they were still happy to be hunting!

liners with medium wool socks and toe warmers are also a good idea.

6. As a final measure, think about more charcoal warmers strategically placed between your shoulder blades, near your lower back and on your chest to really help maintain your core temperature. Be careful not to stick them directly on your skin, though, as they can get pretty hot!



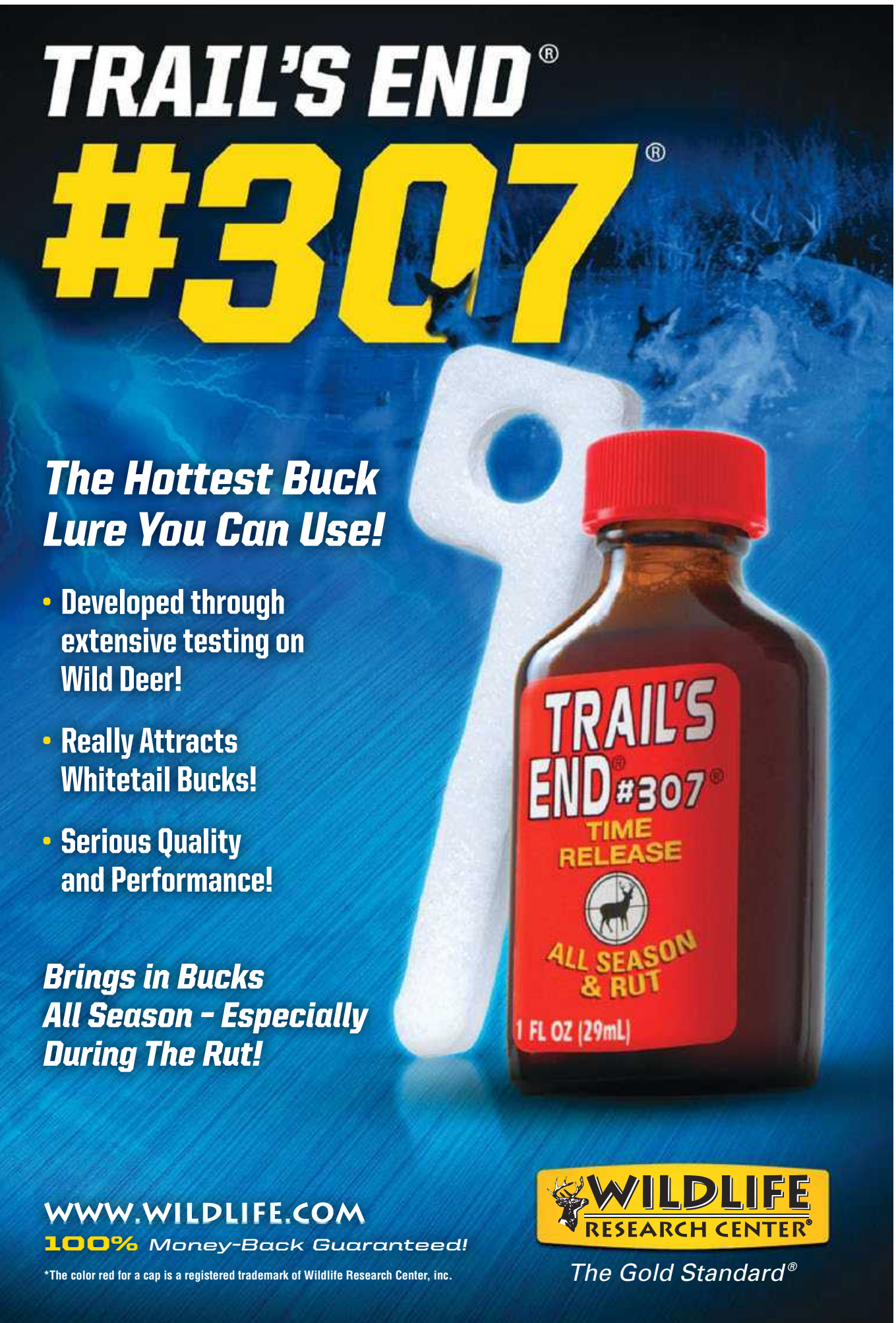
The POLAR BLAST

chatter about trophy buck hunting in The Land of the Giants wasn't present. After only four sits, the polar blast seemed to be breaking us.

After a quick bite to eat, Kendra and I dashed the short 20 yards from the lodge to the scent-free garage where we stored our heavy hunting duds. Before departing, I cranked Kendra's bow down another half turn and instructed her to aim two to three inches high on any shot over 20 yards. Kendra grunted a barely-audible "OK" and we were off. By the time a child reaches 16 or 17, most fathers know their kids pretty well. With Kendra's solemn answer, her frustration about not being able to draw and the miserable conditions before us, I couldn't help but wonder if my daughter was still having fun and, more importantly, were these horrid conditions and our lofty goals ruining bowhunting for her?

Forty-five minutes later, while strapped into our tree, a slight vibration in the right front pocket of my heavily insulated bibs interrupted my thoughts. Why I checked that particular text I am unsure, but I'm glad I did. A clear trail camera photo of a mature 8-point buck with the words, "Shoot this buck if you see him!" prophetically arrived from Andrew. One glance at the slumped over teen below me and the decision was made — given the chance, I'd encourage Kendra to arrow this buck without hesitation.

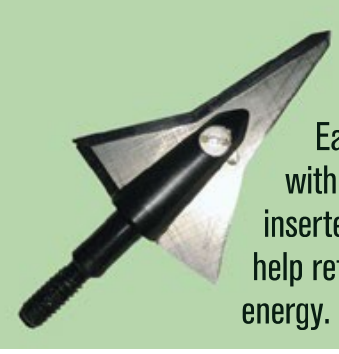
I got a thumbs-up when I leaned forward and showed the picture to



Prepare Properly

While a really big Kansas whitetail buck might approach 300 pounds live weight, the fact of the matter is these big deer are still thin-skinned game that don't require you to shoot an extra-heavy draw weight. Remember, cold temperatures suck the energy out of you like nothing else. I quickly found out that drawing your bow when you are frozen like a Popsicle is very different than when you are practicing a few shots at home.

Before your next hunt, dress in every piece of hunting clothing you plan on wearing, and then attempt to draw your bow. A good rule of thumb is if you can't draw smoothly and easily while sitting down, you have too much poundage. Instead of shooting a heavy draw weight, maximize the amount of energy transferred out of your bow by increasing the weight of your arrow. I shoot an Easton Axis arrow with a weight tube inserted inside to help retain more energy. My 2-blade,



Kendra. I assume she smiled, too, although I couldn't tell behind her facemask. No sooner had I stored my phone than movement caught my eye. Two yearlings and a large doe emerged from the brush. There was no need to tap Kendra's shoulder, as she too had seen the deer. A brief moment later, another doe dogged by an immature suitor entered the opening below us. And then it happened — to our right, a flash of bone and a much larger-bodied deer trotted through the trees.

"Pick up your bow!" I hissed. Somehow, Kendra managed to hear my muffled instructions and by the time she stood and pivoted, the big 8-pointer came to a screeching halt right before us.

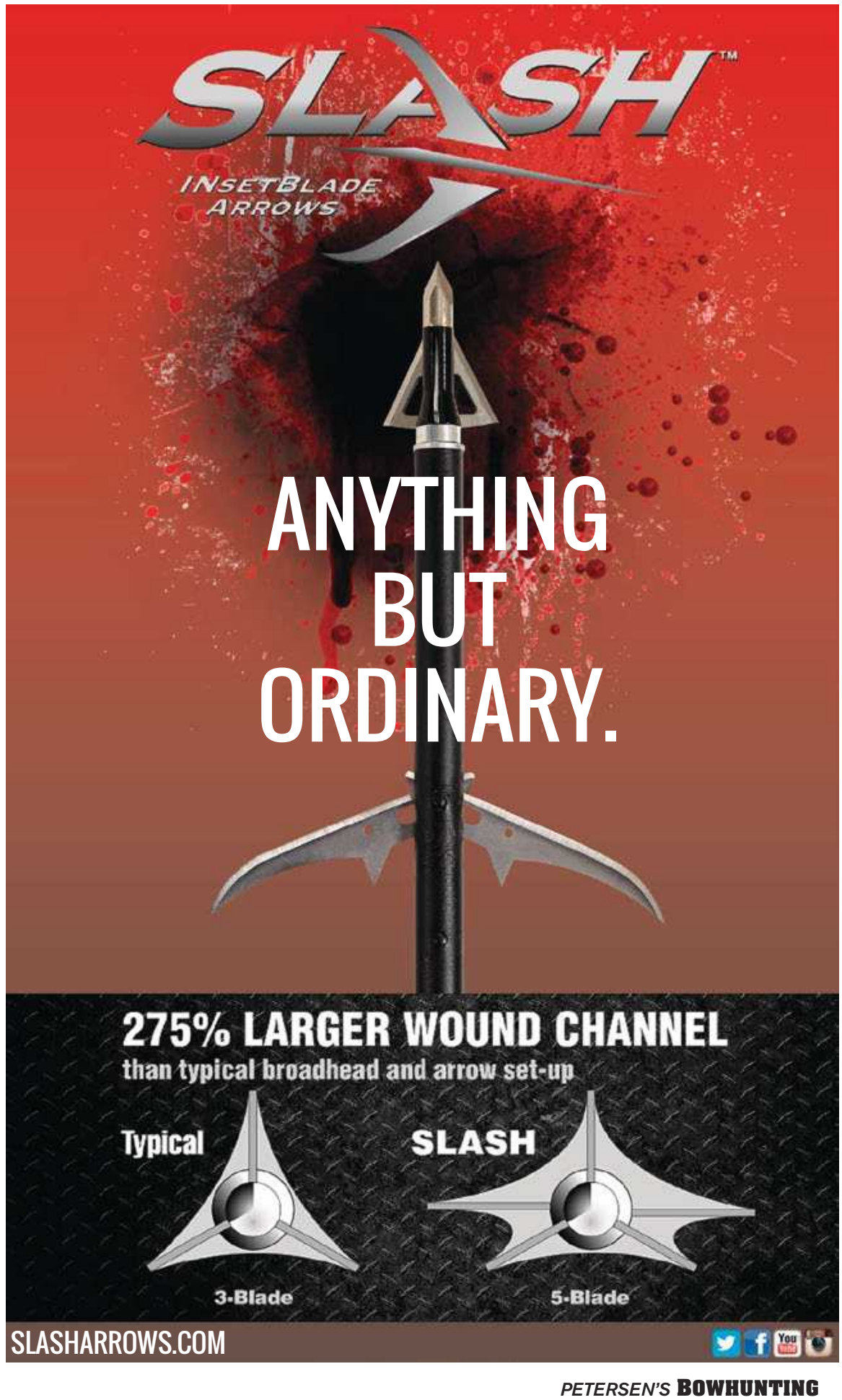
The Leica Rangemaster told me the precise distance of 24 yards, and that was quickly relayed to my experienced teen. She knew what to do. As the buck looked away, the bow slowly came up and the limbs began to compress. Halfway through her draw cycle though, a slight hesitation made my heart nearly leap from my already pounding chest. We both knew there would be no second or third attempt to draw, so every ounce of strength was mustered to complete the draw. Words cannot express how relieved I was to see those cams break over! The rest was easy; I'll never forget watching Kendra's well-placed arrow enter just off the back rib or the big grin that was revealed when Kendra turned to me and pulled her facemask down!

for One Good Shot!

By Kendra Brush

single-bevel Helix broadheads penetrate like crazy! In fact, in the last 12 months, I've gotten a full pass-through on an Alaskan brown bear and three mature whitetail deer with this setup.

Equally important is pinpoint accuracy, and that doesn't happen by chance. My dad insists on lots of "real life" practice in the months preceding my hunts. Actually, he doesn't even call it practice. To us, it's training! Flinging arrows on flat ground at a buck target is better than nothing, but my father takes it up a notch by creating a more realistic and challenging scenario. Several years ago, my dad made me a mini 3-D course in the woods behind our house. It has two treestands at different heights, and three Cabela's deer targets spread around. Shooting one quality arrow at each target simulated the "real deal" and helped me visualize what it would be like when an actual deer magically appears. Each day while I was at school, Dad would move my targets to different distances and body angles. By training this way, I was better prepared to make my one shot count.



The POLAR BLAST

But Was It Fun?

Recovering Kendra's buck was anti-climatic. After texting Richard and Andrew and then waiting my customary hour for the animal to expire, we took up a very copious 80-yard blood trail. We saw the fallen trophy simultaneously, but it was Andrew who put two and two together.

"That's the buck I texted you, Greg!" he excitedly exclaimed.

Indeed it was. Hugs, high-fives and a cold but rewarding photo session ensued. As we loaded Kendra's buck onto the truck, Richard nonchalantly asked the question of the day, "Did you have fun, Kendra?"

To my delight, my daughter immediately replied, "Are you kidding me? I had a blast!"

Exhaling deeply, I couldn't help but think, *Yeah, a polar blast!*



Richard Blakeslee and Kendra pose with her 2013 archery trophy, which really got her hooked on bowhunting.



YOU'RE EITHER
A LEGEND,

OR A LIAR.

TELL US YOUR
#MUZZYMOMENT

MUZZY
BROADHEADS

T·H·E Sky High BUCK

More Than 30 Years of Dreaming Was Well Worth the Wait



MATT WHITE/ROCKHOUSE MOTION PHOTO

By Doug Stults

This story for me started when I was a very young boy. I remember my dad telling the story of a great buck he had killed and, as he told it, waiting with anticipation for the next word. I stared at the stars and dreamed of the monster buck I would someday kill. When I did, I would be able to tell the story to my friends around the campfire. In the tradition of hunting, my quest for the elusive whitetail deer started that night. Now, after more than 30 years of chasing, I am very excited to finally be able to tell this hunting story around the campfire.

A New Strategy

I have been hunting Kansas for many years, but always during the rut or just before. In 2014, I decided I needed to change things up as I had not found the buck I have been dreaming about for so many years. I had shot some very nice deer, but the deer with the antlers that would reach to the sky had eluded me. For years, my good friend in Kansas had been trying to convince me that December was the best month, so I made plans to hunt Kansas right before Christmas, hoping for an early present.

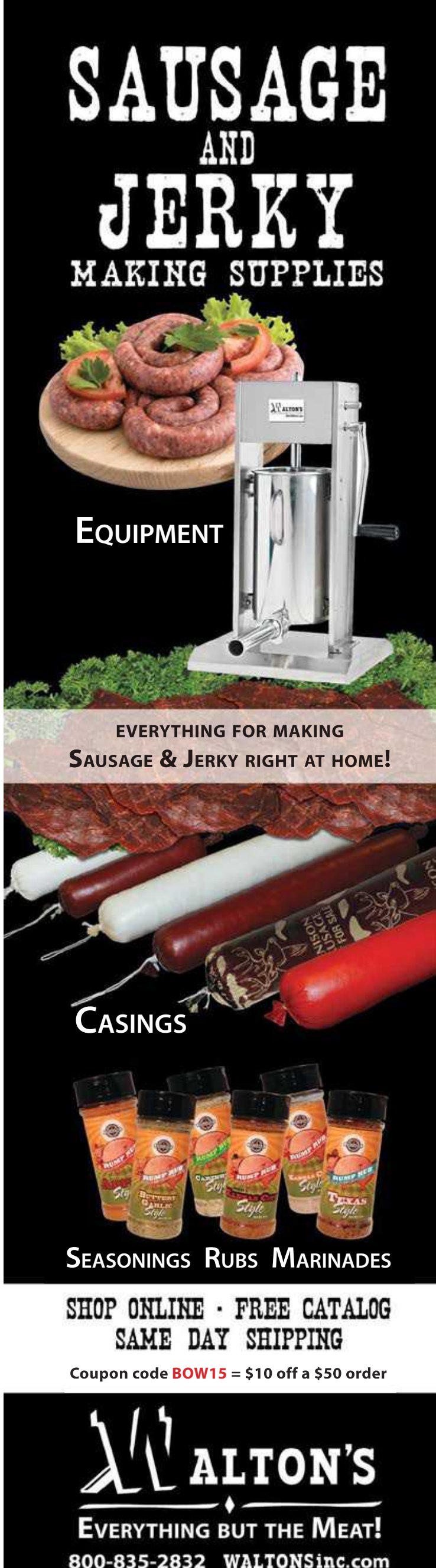
After many years of hunting Kansas whitetails during the rut but not finding the truly giant buck he was seeking, Wyoming resident Doug Stults took a friend's advice and scheduled his 2014 Kansas hunt for December. The move paid off, big time!



MATT WHITE/ROCKHOUSE MOTION PHOTO

The month of November had been fairly warm with little snow. That was good for me, as I didn't want that sky-high buck of my dreams to get killed during the rut. I remember thinking about my strategy, as I had always hunted the pre-rut or rut. Not knowing what to expect in the post-rut, I did a lot of reading and asked friends what should be the focus. Food was the number one answer to my questions, as I thought it might be. I knew this hunt wouldn't be as action-filled as a rut hunt. There wouldn't be any hauling of decoys or rattling horns and calls. No, this sounded like a nice relaxing hunt with no pressure as far as setting up decoys, rattling or wondering if I was calling too much or too little. Instead, I was up for a relaxing pick-a-spot-and-hunt vacation.

Well, maybe not such a relaxing hunt. I forgot about the fact there was no way to bring the deer to you if it's not below zero. In December, after the pressure of the rut, it's very hard to find those big bucks or to get them to come out during daylight. For me, the hunt has always been harder than it should be. I've been very fortunate to take great animals, but never had an easy hunt. It seems I'm always filling my tag at the last minute of the hunt. Some people may think that is a bad thing, but not me as I always appreciate the hunt more because I had to work very hard for every one.



T·H·E Sky High BUCK

Rats!

On the first day of my December hunt, I saw a lot of deer so I was never bored, but I would choose seeing two deer all day instead than 20 if at least one of those is a shooter. There wasn't one in the bunch on that day — lots of great young bucks that made me think "next year will be fantastic."

The next morning was the start of an amazing couple of days. A good friend and I had talked about a 180-class buck in the area. I told him I would pass on it if I had the chance as it was only a 4-year-old deer. This big boy had G2s and G3s that were 12-13 inches — and yes, I would have to pass. Then we went back and forth about another 4-year-old, this one featuring a hooked eye guard and we decided I would shoot him if he came in.



Author Doug Stults knew there were other shooters in the area, but one of the keys to killing a truly exceptional buck such as this is a willingness to pass many other great bucks along the way.

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I was very excited to know that this deer had made it through the rut and I might have a chance at him. From the ground blind, I heard a noise behind me and honestly didn't think anything about it. It was getting close to dark and I saw a huge-framed buck coming my way. *This is it*, I thought.

What I didn't mention up until this point is the resident living in the blind with me. Just as the 180-inch buck with the hooked eye-guard was coming in, a pack rat climed over the top of the blind and tried to open the steel latch on the door. As luck would have it, it spooked the deer. Surprisingly, I was not as mad as I thought I would be. Instead, I just put it in the hands of the good Lord, thinking He must have a different plan for me.

Game On!

My friend decided he was going to hunt with me for the next set. I think he thought I was kidding about the pack rat in the blind and decided he would watch from a treestand 100 yards away. The night was cool and crisp, with lots of movement. Deer were everywhere. The breeze was out of the north, and I had a bean field in front of me with lots of deer feeding. Suddenly, all of the deer in the field ran to the north, away from where I was sitting. As I was trying to figure out why, a gorgeous bobcat with big spots prowled into the field. As all deer (and I) calmed down, they moved back into the field as I settled back down into my chair. It was getting closer to dark as a 150-class and 130-inch deer started to spar in front of me. Excitement was building now as we were getting close to the big



The Kansas buck taken by author Doug Stults in 2014 has a little bit of everything — split brow tines, excellent mass, great tine length and a bonus beam on the left side!

buck hour, as I call it. I got mesmerized by the sparring when out of nowhere walked the buck of my dreams!

I grabbed my bow while he walked 25 yards in front of me, very fast and quartering away. My mind was racing. I tried to not think about what was in front of me, but I saw the hook on his browtine and the rack that seemed to reach to the sky! This is the buck I had been dreaming about since I was a boy listening to my dad. I never believed this dream would really come true. I had to make the shot. As he stopped, still quartering away, I settled the pin on the last rib and let the arrow find the mark. This is why I practice so much. It has to become a habit to make that shot. I honestly don't remember if I used the right pin, but the sound was what I wanted to hear.

The buck of my dreams ran about 80 yards over the hill and into the trees. I couldn't tell how well he was hit. My buddy came over to the blind and we talked about how the other deer reacted — they had run over to the edge of the trees to look at something. Still, we decided to sneak out of there without spooking the rest of the deer in the field. I wanted to scream with excitement, but I had to wait till the morning as we were not 100 percent sure of the shot. Of course, I didn't get a wink of sleep! I was almost positive the buck had crashed and died at the edge of the trees, but with a buck like this I was not taking any chances. When in doubt, back out!

Worth the Wait

Word had spread in the night and the next morning we had a crew of about 12 guys to look for this buck. Instead of starting from where the buck was when I shot, I cheated and went right to where I last saw him. Sure enough, he was laying there. The Sky High Buck was dead!

Everyone in the group was from around the area and no one had pictures or had seen this buck. For three years, my friend had been telling me that big bucks just show up this time of year and you never know what might walk out! I killed the buck of my dreams in just three days. Although it was not my typical hunt, in my head I had been hunting him for more than 30 years. I still don't know how to describe how it feels to accomplish something you have dreamed about for that long, but I just have to say thanks to my Kansas friends for making that dream come true.



BY **JON E. SILKS**

Cabela's Instinct Xcite



Cabela's new Instinct Xcite is built for speed on an oversized, single-cam system, which is advertised to produce IBO speeds reaching 338 fps on a 6½-inch brace height. Xcite limbs are solid in form and reach a parallel position at full draw, while the limb pockets are extremely minimal — using little material to get the job done. The reflex aluminum riser is home to a one-piece composite grip and FLX-Guard cable-containment system.

Cabela's enters the flagship bow arena with the introduction of the Instinct Xcite, which was engineered in partnership with Bowtech. The Xcite features a single-cam system, Gordon Composite limbs, a forged aluminum riser, a one-piece, injection-molded grip and vibration-dampening accessories on the cable guard, riser and cable.

All About That Base

The Instinct Xcite is based on a forged, 6061 aluminum riser machined into final form for the best fit and function. The riser is constructed in a "reflex" configuration, which means the limb pocket pivot points are positioned in front of (further away from the shooter) the deepest part of the grip. Depending on the limb angle, length, etc., this reflex allows for a longer power stroke and more speed. Power stroke is the actual distance the archer moves the string from its resting position to full draw. The riser contains many cutouts along its length to reduce overall material and mass weight. Finally, the riser is finished through a film-dipping process in Cabela's Zonz Woodlands camo.

Attached just above the arrow shelf and on the outside surface of the sight window, the FLX-Guard cable-containment system has an attachment arm that acts much like a bow limb, flexing during the draw cycle. When the bow is drawn, the arm gives way to system tension and bends toward the centerline of the rig, reducing accuracy-stealing riser torque. When the shot is fired, the FLX-Guard automatically springs back out of the way of passing vanes.

The Instinct Xcite grip is designed to produce a neutral wrist position and the materials selected are intended to produce consistent hand placement and a measure of insulation from cold metal during frigid days afield. Vinyl side plates contain the bow's name and complement the one-piece injection molded grip.

Other riser-based features include a machined aluminum broadhead guard, metal stabilizer mounting insert and embedded name plate. Cabela's and Bowtech use the riser-based Bio-Shock dampeners and Clutch String Stop to reduce vibration and noise.

Gordon's Magic

Gordon Composite is the industry standard for bow limb material and has stood the test of time and countless shot cycles across dozens of bow makers, hundreds of bow models and thousands upon thousands of archers. The Xcite's conventional (solid, not split) E-Glass limbs measure 12 inches long, are CNC machined and matched into sets based on unique deflection values for consistency. The limbs are hydrographic film dipped in Cabela's Zonz Woodlands camo. Limb pockets, if you can call them that, are super minimalistic in material, while still controlling lateral movement and weight adjustment.

Off-Limb Anchor

This bow was built for speed. The Xcite Single Cam features Bowtech's

SPECIFICATIONS

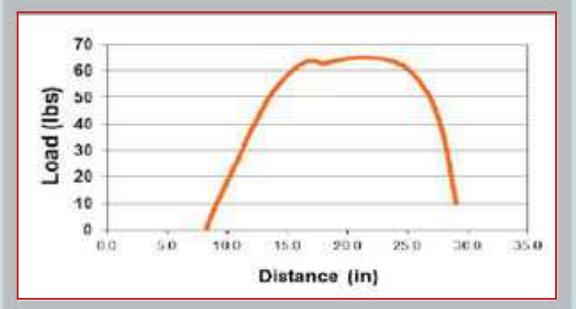
Manufacturer: Cabela's, 800-237-4444; www.cabelas.com
Model: Instinct Xcite
Cam System: Instinct Single Cam
Weight: 3.9 pounds (advertised); 3.8 pounds (as tested)
Brace Height: 6 ½ inches
Axle-To-Axle length: 31 ¾ inches
Letoff: 80%
Draw Weights: 60 and 70 pounds peak
Draw Lengths: 26-31 inches, in half-inch increments; rotating module
Riser: Reflex, 6061 aluminum
Limbs 12 inch, machined Gordon Composite materia
String: BCY 452X, 91.8 inches
Cables: BCY 452X, 33 incher
Grip: Composite one-piece, with vinyl side plate
Finish: Cabela's Zonz Woodlands camo
Advertised IBO Speed: 338 fps
Suggested Retail Price: $899
Comments: A solid performer across the board.

Cabela's®

THE UPSHOT

	ARROW SPEED	KINETIC ENERGY	DYNAMIC EFFICIENCY
375-GRAIN ARROW	296 fps	72.97 foot-pounds	84.95%
425-GRAIN ARROW	279 fps	73.47 foot-pounds	85.53%

DRAW-FORCE CURVE



Editor's Note: *Our standardized High Grade testing includes the use of the same equipment and test methods. All bows are tested with a draw length of 29 inches and a draw weight of 65 pounds, unless otherwise noted.*

Throttle Cam Technology, which places the bearing assembly on the limb tips, allowing cam track geometries to approach the center of rotation. This equalizes torque distances above and below the axis of rotation for better nock travel and also equalizes tension on the string and cables at brace height to eliminate uneven creep. A rotating module on the cam offers 6 inches of draw-length adjustment, from 26-31 inches in half-inch increments. The system produces an advertised IBO speed of 338 fps on a 6½-inch brace height with 80 percent letoff.

Impressions

The draw of the Instinct Xcite is smooth right up to the point it hits the wall, which is very pronounced. Average shock and a low-level of lasting vibration were noted at the shot. A quality stabilizer absolutely killed the vibration. Shot noise was very low with heavier arrows — add a string silencer for super light arrows. If you are simply grabbing the grip while carrying the bow, you may not be overly fond of it as the front is squared off. However, when it comes time to bring the string to full draw, this grip is well-formed, functional and comfortable.

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PATIENCE PAYS OFF

After years of waiting for a non-resident Iowa bow tag, the time had come. Day one brought temps in the mid-60s, and it was expected to drop to 20 degrees by nightfall and continue through the week. The beauty of hunting the rut is you never know what is going to happen. After seeing a few bucks out of range in the morning, I was enjoying the warm breeze when I heard this buck coming through the timber. I grunted him to five yards, and when he got nervous stopped him at 30 yards before putting him down with a perfect shot.

Michael MacEachern, Harrietta, Mich.

DOUBLE DIPPING

On Oct. 6, 2014, I was hunting elk and deer in Central Montana with my hunting buddy Roy. On the third day we got into a herd of elk, and some enticing with the bugle tube brought the 6x7 bull in and he gave me an 11-yard shot. Three days later we got into some mule deer and I connected on a nice 3x4 buck. We had a great time hunting and my new Matthews Chill-X, Carbon Express arrows and G5 Montecs did the job with my first elk and mule deer with the bow.

Doug Fahnestock, Manheim, Pa.

FIRST KILL

This is a picture of my girlfriend, Leah Matalon, with her very first deer on her second time hunting. I agreed to bring her up to one of my favorite stands about a week ago and let her carry along my dad's TenPoint crossbow. I hung my Lone Wolf on the tree just above her so I could coach her through everything. Unfortunately, we ended up getting skunked. However, our farmer set us up nicely by missing a nice-sized chunk of beans in front of a ladder stand I had hung. I decided to send her up in that stand with the TenPoint as the wind was perfect and the area had not been hunted yet. About two hours later my phone was buzzing with a flurry of texts letting me know she shot one. It was all I could do to convince her she couldn't get out of her treestand for at least 15 minutes. By the time I got to her she had already found blood. The deer died about 30 yards from where she shot it – a perfect shot on big, old doe.

Chase A. Mallory, Columbus, Ohio

The next time you tag out, share your success with the *BOWHUNTING* community by adding your photo and story to our online gallery at:

www.bowhuntingmag.com/photos

All online submissions will also be considered for inclusion in our monthly Tagged Out page here in the magazine.

BETTER LATE THAN NEVER

I got to my stand late that morning for unknown reasons and it was almost light when I got there. It wasn't long after though when I had just finished a small series of soft grunting and using the rattling bag when I heard footsteps coming in quickly behind me. I looked out of the corner of my eye and saw this buck walk under my stand around 10 yards out. He walked out around 15 yards, but wouldn't give me a broadside shot. He started to walk away, then put his nose in the air and I assume smelled some of the rutting scents I had put out. He turned around and came back and stood broadside at 15 yards. I let the arrow fly and he went down around 50 yards out. A great ending to what I thought was a horrible start!

John Quinn, Cumberland, Md.





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The Right Price

The new CARBON XS is a full-containment arrow rest from TRUGLO that is comprised of an optimal combination of lightweight composites and CNC-machined metal for durability. Sealed bushings increase downward speed at launch, and a high-strength torsion spring increases launcher performance. Additionally, it includes quick and easy installation without the need for a bow press.

MSRP: $49
Contact: TRUGLO, 888-887-8456; www.truglo.com

Adding On



A new addition to one of the industry's fastest growing hunting apparel lines is the Men's ½ Zip Performance Fleece Pullover from Huntworth. This mid-weight pullover is a 230-gram, four-way stretch garment that offers top-notch flexibility and durability. Hunters can use it as their only layer in the early-season, or under a heavier jacket. It features a zippered chest pocket that will accommodate any small item that you wish to keep close. Available in the company's Oak Tree EVO camo.

MSRP: $49.99
Contact: Huntworth, 877-945-6837; www.huntworthgear.com

Start 'Em Young

Written by Keith Beam, co-founder of Double Bull Blinds, the Drake's Adventures book series is a great way to introduce your children to the tradition of hunting from an early age. Made of high-quality materials, each book includes eight sounds of the hunt as well as a 'Narrate All' button that will read the entire story to your child. There's also a headphone jack for those long car rides, so the story and lifelike sounds can be enjoyed over and over again.



MSRP: $24.99
Contact: Drake's Adventures, 844-372-5371; www.drakesadventures.com

New Pattern Available

Mossy Oak has announced that the Cabela's Men's Lookout series of clothing is now available in the company's new Break-Up Country pattern. Comprised of a jacket and pant, the Lookout series is made with 100 percent polyester bonded-grid fleece for a smooth and quiet garment. It's lightweight and gives hunters full freedom of movement, so it can be worn in any situation. Jacket features include an attached hood, handwarmer pockets and a zippered chest pocket, while pants have double-reinforced knees and articulated joints for movement.



MSRP: $99-$119
Contact: Mossy Oak, 662-494-8859; www.mossyoak.com

Top-Notch Storage

The ozone-based ScentCrusher line has been expanded with the innovative Hunter's Closet. It stands at 68x45x20 inches and is built with a heavy-duty lining and zippers. Using the same ozone generator found in the company's Gear Bag to eliminate bacteria and odors in mere minutes, the unit will be perfect for garages, basements or anywhere else that you might happen to store your hunting clothing and gear. Generator has a life of 20 years and is totally maintenance-free.



MSRP: $499.99
Contact: ScentCrusher, 877-575-3173; www.scentcrusher.com



Going Worldwide

Following the addition of the American Flag to the Ice Vane line is another Bohning Archery expansion — the Canadian Flag and Australian Flag Blazer Vanes. Like other True Color designs, these are done with a UV-cured printing process to guarantee a sharp, smudge-free image on each vane. Average weight for each True Color Blazer is 6.3 grains, while length and height will remain unchanged from the original Blazer — 1.987 inches long and 0.586-inch high.

MSRP: $18.99 (36 pack), $37.39 (100 pack)
Contact: Bohning Archery, 231-229-4247; www.bohning.com

Lending A Hand

How many times have you been forced to climb from your tree after dropping a facemask, glove or even the all-important release aid? That can be a thing of the past with the help of the Booger Treestand Retriever from Walnut Grove Hunting. Made of ⅛-inch hardened steel, this lightweight, durable product can be lowered from your platform to retrieve your items for you. When set, the weight of the Booger will trip the spring-loaded trigger and the fingers will close on your dropped item. Cord sold separately.



MSRP: $29.95
Contact: Walnut Grove Hunting, 419-736-3530; www.walnutgrovehunting.com



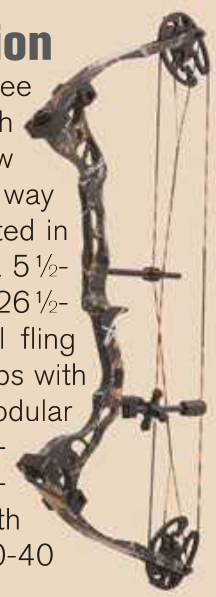
Lookin' Fresh

The Ultimate Hunter Stabilizer from Bowfinger Archery has a brand new look in the form of a Mossy Oak Break-Up Country finish. Available in 6-, 8- and 10-inch lengths, the stabilizers are engineered to provide quiet and balanced shots for improved accuracy. Containing the company's After Shock internal dampener, each one rapidly dissipates resonating vibration during and after the shot. Each one is made of extreme rigid carbon fiber and includes two weights at 2 ounces and 10 ounces.

MSRP: $64.95 (6-inch), $69.95 (8-inch), $74.95 (10-inch)
Contact: Bowfinger Archery, 615-952-5858; www.bowfingerarchery.com

Perfect Introduction

Weighing in at just three pounds, the Spawn Youth Compound Bow from New Breed Archery is the perfect way to get your youngsters started in our sport. The Spawn has a 5½-inch brace height and a 26½-inch axle-to-axle length. It'll fling arrows downrange at 240 fps with the help of the Bionix 2.0 Modular Cam System, featuring draw-length adjustment from 16-26 inches. It is available with draw weights of 20-30, 30-40 and 40-50 pounds.



MSRP: $369
Contact: New Breed Archery, 888-363-3545; www.newbreedarchery.com

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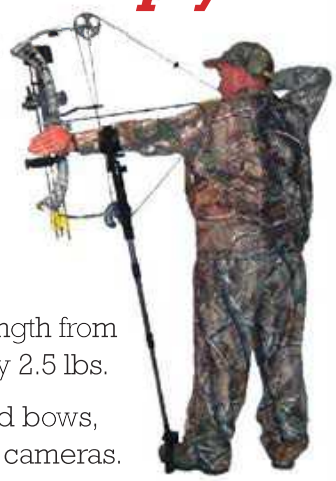
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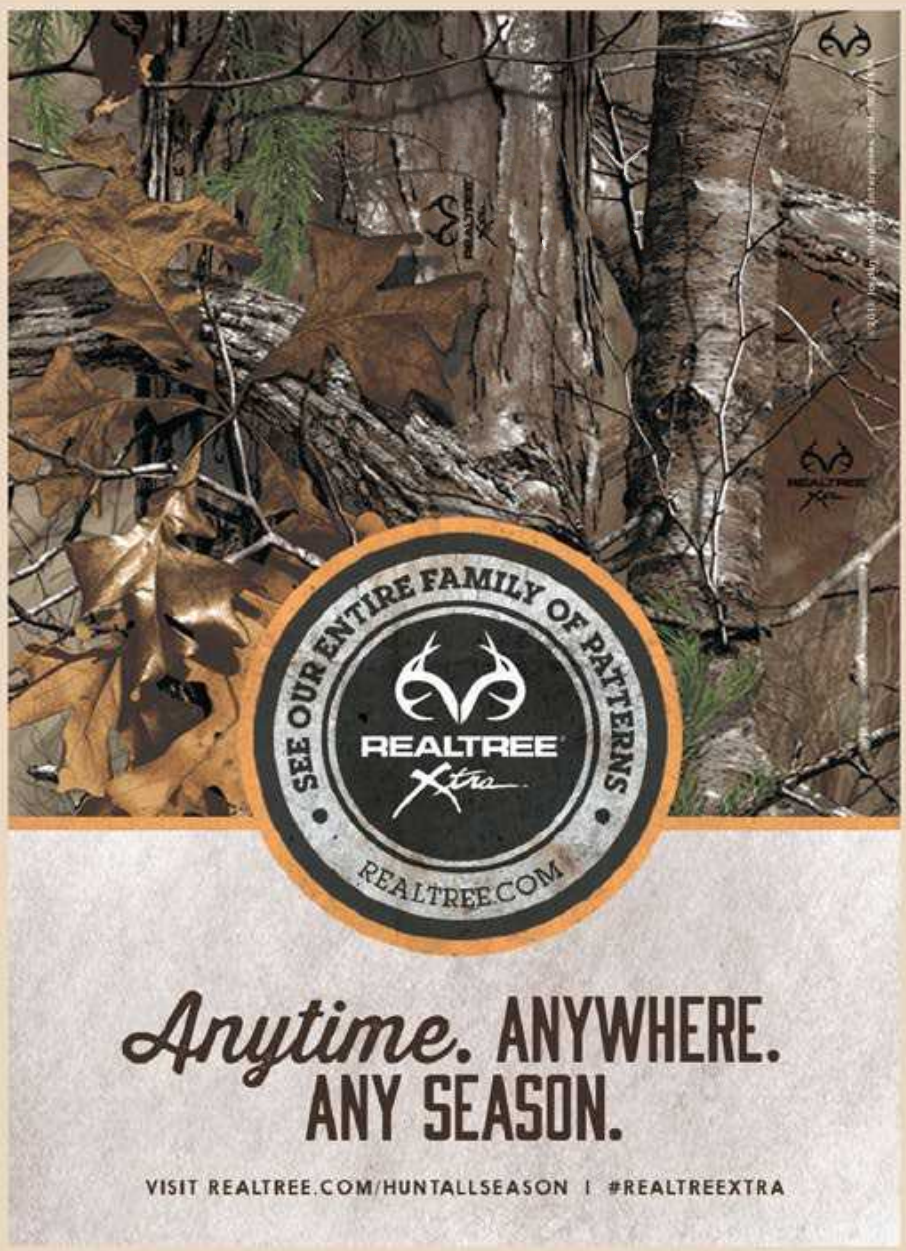
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BY **JIM DOUGHERTY**

Pennsylvania Deer Drives

It was the early 60s when I was first charged with running a deer camp for Ben Pearson Archery in far-off Pennsylvania. I say "far off" because I lived in Southern California at the time. No matter how you looked at it then, California and Pennsylvania were far apart; they still are!

The purpose of this deer camp was to teach our "Big Box" customers something about archery and bowhunting, talk merchandising strategies and, most importantly, see they had a fine time. Along with Pearson Pro Staffers Len Cardinale and Phil Durr, whom I recruited to assist since they lived much closer to the hunting grounds, I figured I could handle most of the other details from So-Cal. Not quite!

The camp's location was a quaint little retreat along the banks of a lovely river, specializing in float trips, breakfast, lunch and lodging. The establishment's biggest claim to fame had been hosting John Fitzgerald Kennedy prior to his election as President. Any place good enough for JFK would certainly be satisfactory for a bunch of scrubby, unkempt bowhunters. "Book it!" was my order.

The proprietor of the lodge was an Abraham Lincoln lookalike with a pleasant but craggy face and a loud, rather unbearable orator's voice. He was authoritative, fairly friendly and stuck in his ways. It turned out his "vast hunting experience" revolved around rifles and deer drives, though he solemnly assured us he was extremely wise in the ways of the wily whitetail and we would succeed.

Now bear in mind this was in the "Traditional Era," 50-some years ago. Quality cedar arrow shafts, and even higher quality aluminum arrows, were the ammo of the day, with a few glass shafts gathering interest. File-sharpened broadheads were honed to razor edges. Snappy glass laminations powered our bows; bow quivers carried four arrows and were relatively new products. Pearson's hottest-selling bow was the Palomino, though buyers representing the day's big-box stores leaned to less pricey bow models, arrows, archery sets and accessories. Pro shop operators who were invited spoke on much more knowledgeable levels, which Len and Phil (both pro shop owners) found refreshing.



CARRIE ANDRAYCHAK ILLUSTRATION

Our hunt required different considerations at that time. While we had some early treestands (a far cry from today's whiz-bang models) none of us felt very secure in setting them up for our guests. We had no idea as to the hunting experience — if any — or the age or physical shape most might be in. Their safety and experiencing a great time was primary to the corporate guru's wishes.

Arriving in Pennsylvania a few days before the hunt, I set about with Phil and Len to do some serious scouting, seeking a few good treestand locations, key spots on good-looking deer trails and so on. Happy with our efforts, we then sat down with our host to work out the logistics. For example, when should those who wanted to hunt in the mornings get up?

He explained that no one needed to rise early. He said those guests wanting to participate would be positioned along major deer runs while the drivers, 10 in all, would line up from left to right, with our leader in the the middle. The furthest to his left would be No. 1, he would be No. 6 and Nos. 7 through 10 would be off to his right. Each driver would stay just within sight of those on either side.

When we questioned the wisdom of using such a plan for bowhunting, he launched into an involved dissertation. At 10 a.m., he explained, the sun would be in the right position, the wind perfect, the deer would not leave their beds until the drivers got very close — yadda, yadda, yadda. We would walk at an orderly pace not to exceed two miles per hour with No. 1 singing out every two minutes followed by No. 2 and so on, this cadence continued to the end of the drive, about three quarters of a mile, all uphill. The standers would lie in wait near the top. A whistle was blown and the drive commenced.

Walking in the No. 7 spot, the only deer I saw was a very panicky doe that nearly knocked me ass over teakettle as it steamed back through the line. Three deer ran over the top, more squirted out the sides and not one even got shot at. This tactic, which took almost three hours, was repeated in another large drainage before time out was called. Our stalwart crew limped its way to the adult libation table.

Two drives a day for the next two days! One of the pro shop fellows shot a doe; he got up before daylight and went out by himself. Only a few of our guests ever got up before 9 a.m. Eventually, our host, guide and drive master figured out his tactics didn't blend with our bows and arrows. We, however, liked the way he took command, tried hard and learned our ways. He said he would do better if we came back. We said we would, and we did. You ask why? Well, everyone deserves a second chance.

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